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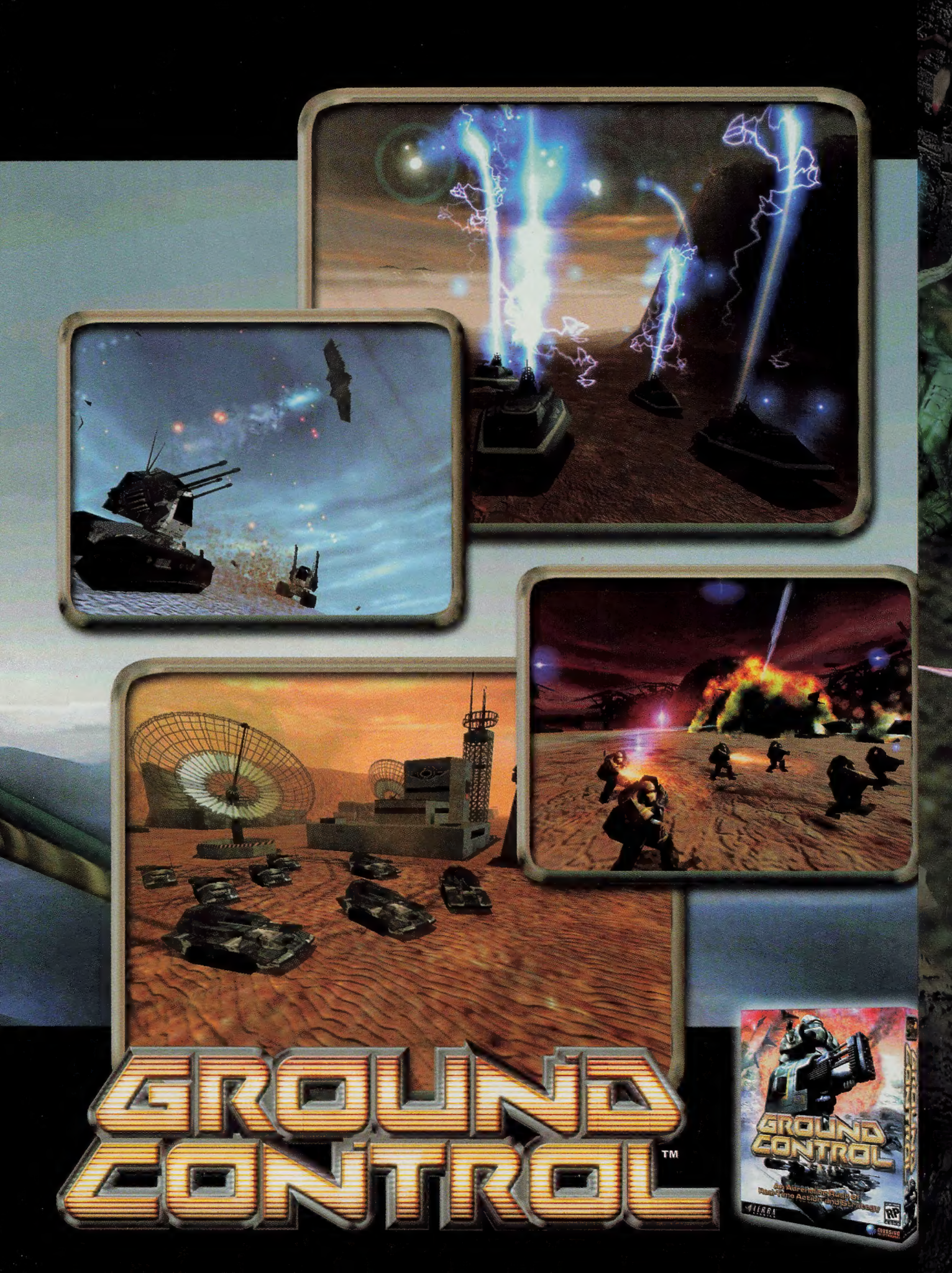
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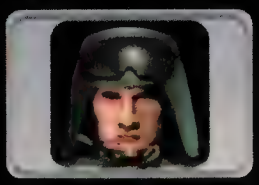

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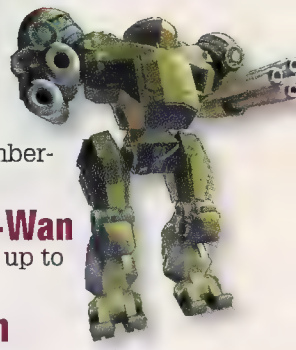

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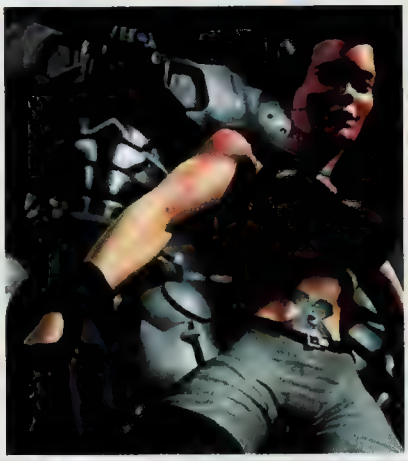

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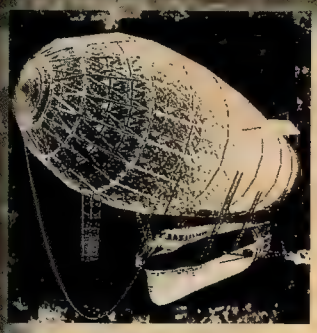

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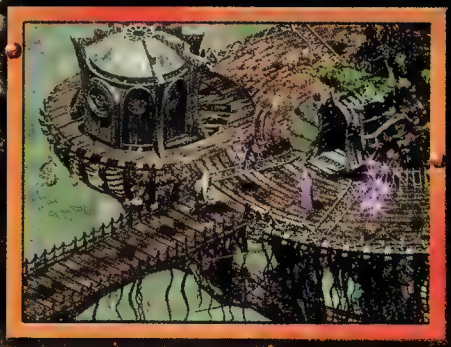

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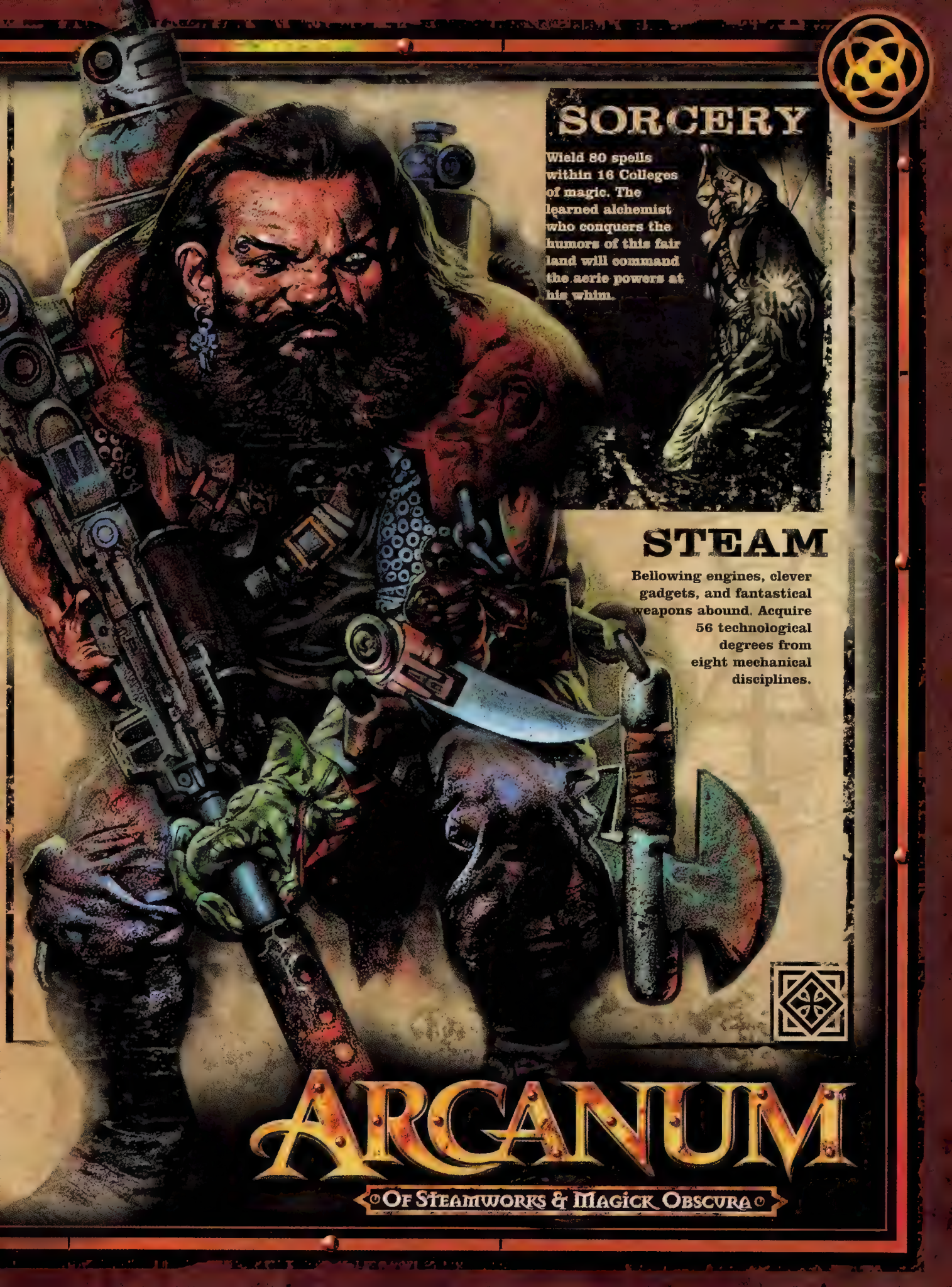
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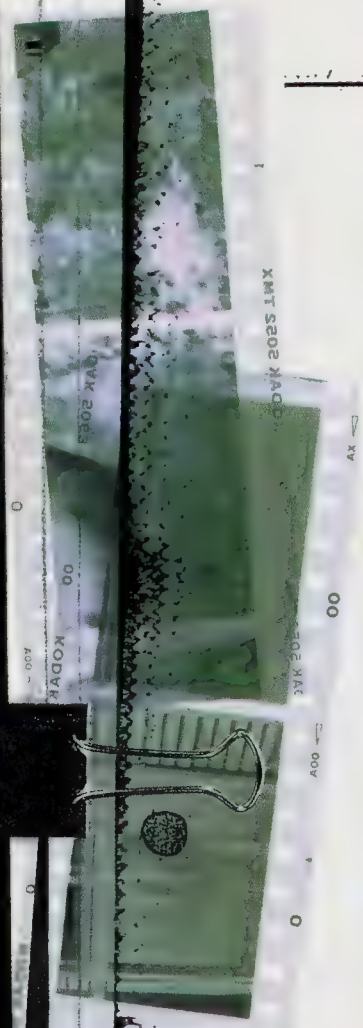

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Diagram B2 Situational Missions (Fig.'s 2.1-2.6)

Fig. 2.1 build your own capabilities

Fig. 2.2 establish base of operations

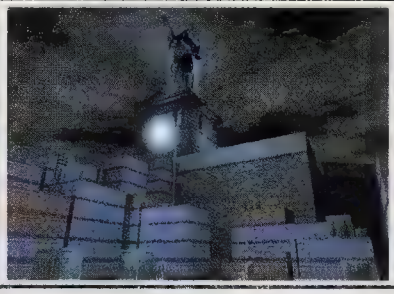

Fig. 2.3 maintain control over Ambrosia

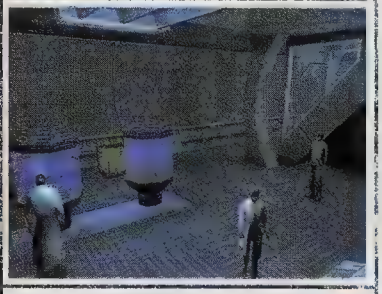

Fig. 2.4 Survive incarceration

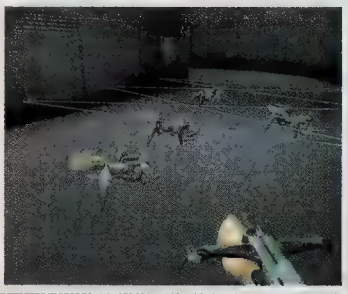

Fig. 2.5 establish ties to ally base

Fig. 2.6 Expand your pool of allies

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I recently got called to the mat regarding piracy and *Computer Gaming World.* In one of those diplomatic but stern letters cut into five tersely-worded paragraphs, four marketing Vice Presidents for four large computer-game companies chastised me for allowing a story to run in our magazine that contained the URL for a notorious CD-ROM copy-protection-cracking site.

Now, our story wasn't endorsing or advocating piracy. Our writer was merely suggesting ways to get your games to run, in case their copy-protection encryption schemes won't work on your CD-ROM drive. This is a situation that the authors of the letter unanimously agreed occurs only 1% of the time. (There was some uncertainty, however, as to how they would help consumers fix this problem—simply sending them another copy, or a different game entirely, isn't much help.)

But the authors pressed an interesting point. By giving out such a URL, aren't we passively condoning piracy?

This thought has been keeping me up late at night. And you know, in some ways, I can't even say that the authors of that letter were wrong. Which is a frightening thought, because as a lifelong gamer, I hate to think that something we wrote, said, or did could help some unsavory character to pirate software. The other side of this argument, of course, is that anyone who really wants to pirate software is going to figure out a way to do it.

"... as a lifelong gamer, I hate to think that something we wrote, said, or did could help some unsavory character to pirate software. The other side of this argument, of course, is that anyone who really wants to pirate software is going to figure out a way to do it."

Does this mean I'm going to do as the authors of that letter suggested, and banish all use of URLs that reference sites that could be construed as encouraging the piracy of software? No. That would be an easy answer, but it's not a responsible one. Not from our journalistic point of view, which holds readers' needs as most important. But—and this has always been the case—we're going to vigilantly patrol the use of such URLs in *Computer Gaming World.*

I'm curious to hear your thoughts on the subject. Send me email at gjones@zd.com.

George Jones

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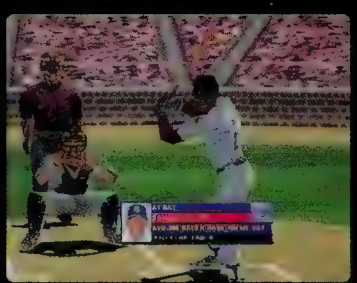

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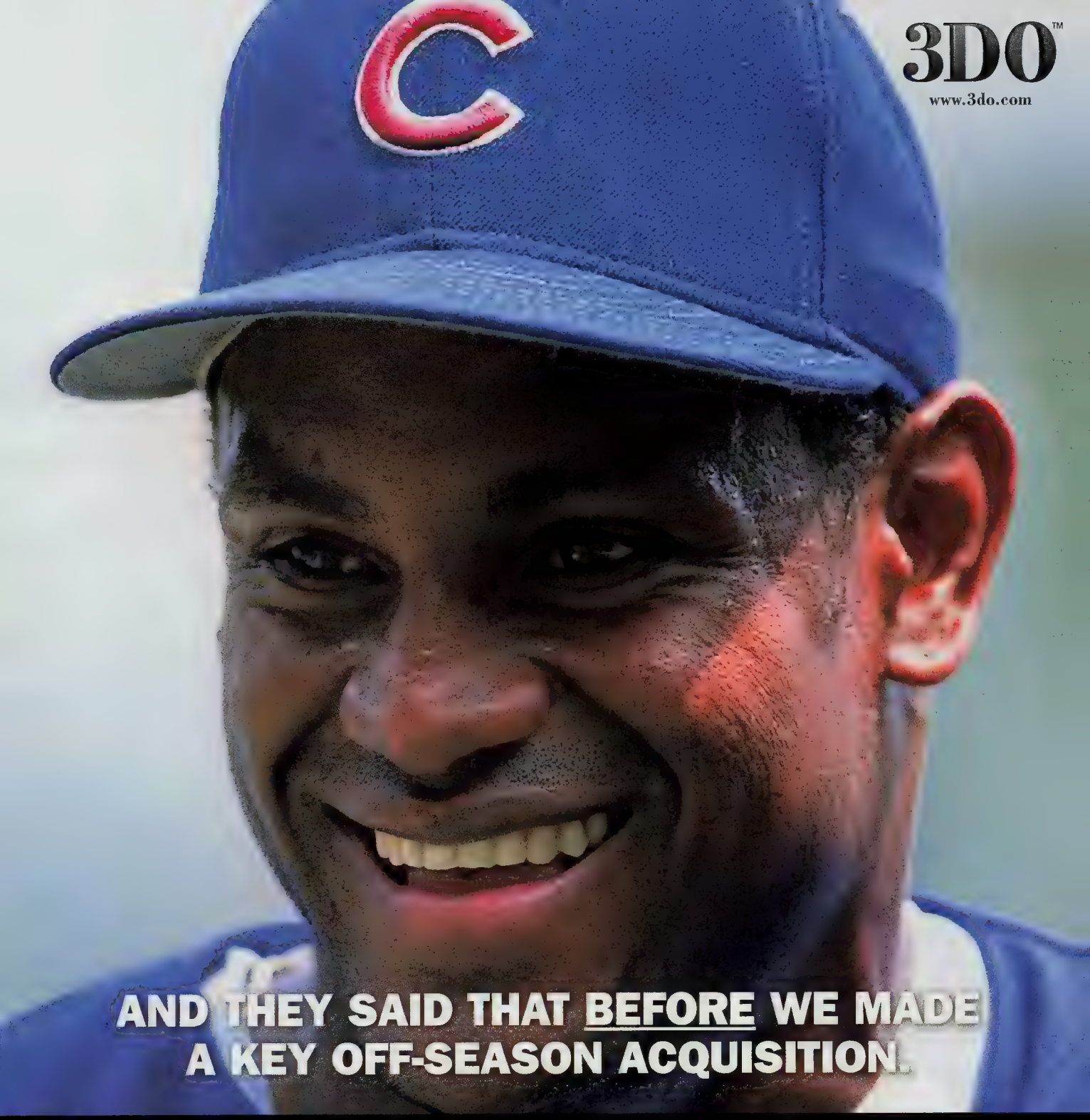

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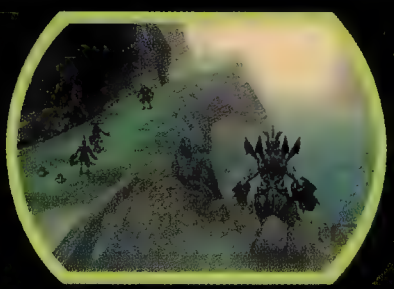

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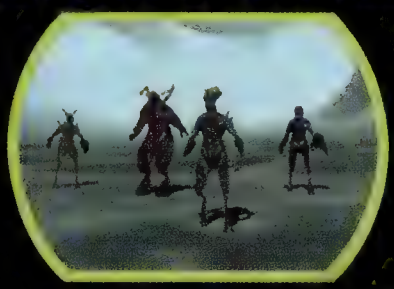

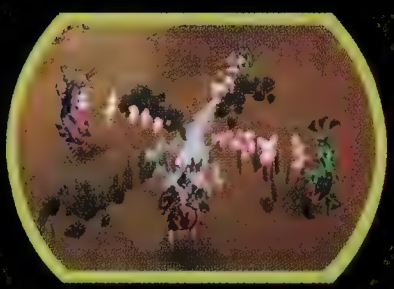

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LETTERS

WHEREFOR WOLF?

I saw an article in the April issue on the RETURN OF WOLF 3D. At the end, it said that there would be a bigger preview in the next issue, but I don't see it in May. Are you previewing it next month or did the game get pushed back?

David Keller

The game got pushed back. Id Software, which is overseeing the development of the game by Gray Matter (formerly Xatrix), wanted to take WOLF 3D in a different direction. The game looked fantastic when we saw it, but unfortunately they asked us to wait until Id signed off on the design and execution. Stay tuned – you'll see it here first when they're ready.

EWOKS: SCOURGE OF THE EMPIRE

I recently got my copy of FORCE COMMANDER and was having fun playing it until I saw those damn, fuzzy wuzzy, annoying little smelly-ass Ewoks.

Here I was, cruising along, killing rebels and scoring big points with Darth Vader. Then they send me to Endor to scout out a place for a shield generator. All of a sudden, I can't go anywhere without a rock hitting one of my storm troopers and doing as much damage as a laser bolt. My scout walkers are useless because if they move, a tree falls on them or they're smashed by two swinging trunks.

I worship George Lucas and the *Star Wars* saga. I've been a fanatic since I was a kid, but I must say that Ewoks totally suck ass. Having these little teddy bears doing things that even a Wookie would have a hard time doing is just a load of crap.

James Morgan
Paris, Illinois

Reader Tip

In HALF-LIFE, don't just smash the vending machines. If you walk up to them and press the "Use" key, it pops out a soda. Touch the soda and you gain one health. You can use each machine about 15 or 25 times.

R. Winter

APRIL FOOL

I was paging through issue 189, looking at the editors' essays when I came across GreenSpeak. Jeff said that he won a deathmatch. This I couldn't believe so I tried to figure out how he did it. Then it hit me: April issue. I didn't expect your April Fool's joke to be so hidden...nice try. Better luck next time, guys.

Joel Krings

Jeff Green responds: *It wasn't a joke! C'mon, I really won! How come nobody listens to me?*

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THE FIRST ULTIMA IX DEFENDER

I just finished ULTIMA IX, and I wanted to say – stop with the ULTIMA IX bashing! You sure didn't give DAGGERFALL this hard of a time when people were falling through floors and it was crashing constantly!

Perhaps ASCENSION was "ripped from the womb" in an imperfect state. Perhaps playtesting it in its original state would be best referred to as "pain inducing." However, with the latest patch I found the game to be incredible. True, you have to save often in case of crashes and quit once every 20–100 minutes to let the memory leak settle, but I was more than willing to put up with this and had a blast. I even passed up playing EVERQUEST so I could play and finish ULTIMA IX.

Could I convince those folk down at *CGW* to do a post-patch review of ULTIMA IX, as they did for ULTIMA VIII? Since the patch, nearly all of the reviewer's cons have been fixed. Though I don't approve much of Origin's recent treatment of their customers regarding further patches of this product, it nonetheless is an excellent one that deserves further recognition.

Donald Hawthorne

PATIENCE PAYS

First, I would like to say that *CGW* makes it real hard to stay faithful to other gaming mags. Your review of ULTIMA IX was right on. Two days before the February issue arrived, I spent seven hours tweaking my PC so it would be able to run ULTIMA IX. I was thinking that I had never seen a 24-page Installation Guide before and was also pondering the fact that QUAKE III ARENA was running like a dream without any tweaks. Your review prompted me to return the game via the nightmare that is the EA warranty department. Jeff Green's "Open Letter to Lord British" (March, 2000) made the stress worthwhile. Next time I'll wait for your review before I bring home another new game.

Lance Carter

CANUCKS JUST WANNA HAVE FUN

Jeff Green's Greenspeak column in the May issue ("My Job Does Not Suck") struck a chord in me when I read it. I am a 41-year-old gamer who works for Canada's Bechtel-competitor up here. People don't understand why my Toastmasters' talks are usually about computer gaming! Your magazine is the greatest. THE SIMS are totally fun and twisted (and getting more so). Thanks to you and other like-thinking-people. Hopefully we can get everyone else to LIGHTEN UP about three brick loads and learn to RELAX and HAVE FUN with life!

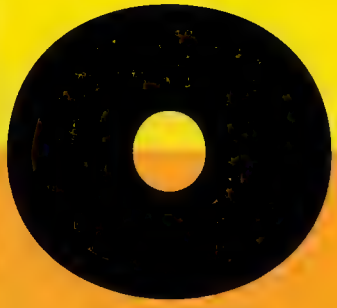
Tom
Calgary, Alberta, Canada

Dept. of Corrections

It's been a busy month here at the Correctional facility. We screwed up royally on the May issue demo lineup, and apologize for not having demos for NASCAR 3, NEED FOR SPEED: PORSCHE, and a non-playable demo of THE SIMS. We were in a transitional phase between CD-ROM editors and we simply messed up. Since then, we've hired Alex "the Handyman" Handy to tame the CD and get all the demo titles right.

Of slightly less consequence, the caption on page 46 of the May issue should have read "DREAMLAND CHRONICLES: FREEDOM RIDGE," not "X-COM ALLIANCE." The spiritual successor to the original X-COM looks awesome. We have a new shot of it and some more coverage on page 36.

Berlin



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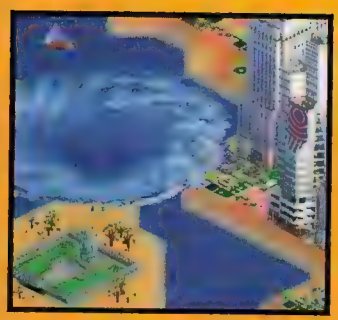

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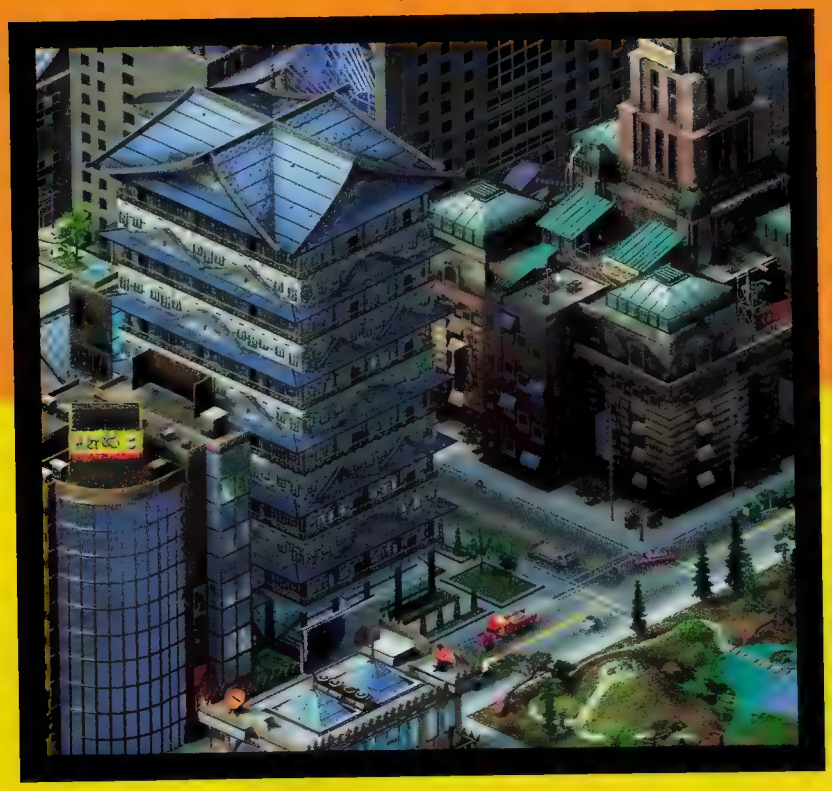

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MUST-SEE E3

A preview of the games everyone will be talking about at this year's Superbowl of gaming, the Electronic Entertainment Expo.

Team Fortress 2: Brotherhood Of Arms

Go watch *When Eagles Dare* or *The Guns of Navarone*. While you're at it, go watch *Saving Private Ryan*. What we're getting at is that TEAM FORTRESS 2: BROTHERHOOD OF ARMS is going to try to emulate the combination of intensity, bravado, and teamwork that such films emphasized.

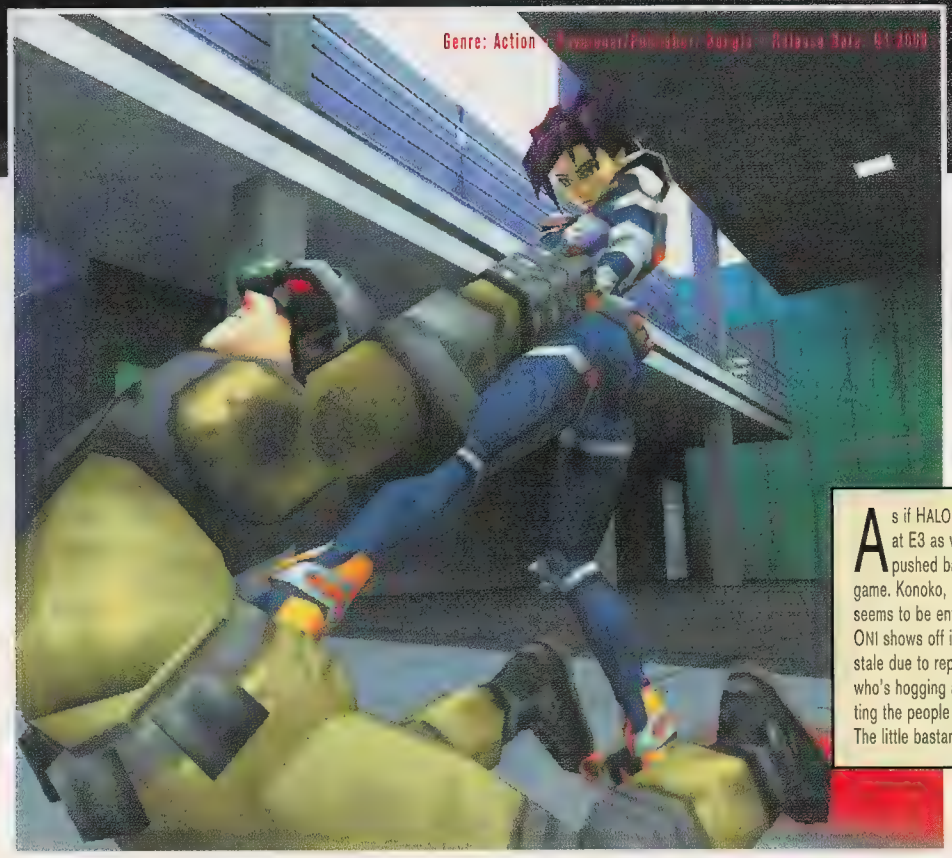
Yes, we're annoyed at how it's been slipping. We remember the days of yore, when it was supposed to be a free download for the original HALF-LIFE. Then it got pushed, with TEAM FORTRESS CLASSIC released to whet our appetite. Then we saw last year's E3 demo, with the parachutin' troops and the war-movie getup. We're still waiting.

Valve is pulling a Blizzard, and we're not sure how to feel. Will it be able to stand up to the games of 2001? Then again. HALF-LIFE took its sweet time in development, and boom, it became the game it was. No matter what, we're anticipating this game simply because we've been hearing the talk, but we want to see some product.

Though, Valve is so busy nowadays, they may not even be showing TF2 at E3. They may just stay in and design-like-mad. They're on record as saying "no TF2 at E3," but they could change their minds at the 11th hour. If they do decide to make an appearance, you can bet on us being there first.

Halo

Last E3, when Bungie showed off HALO behind closed doors, the *CGW* staff left the hidden demo room with our jaws glued to the floor – and this was without seeing any actual gameplay. This year, we're hoping to see a playable version of HALO at E3, and while Bungie won't confirm or deny anything, we've always felt that wishful thinking can make all the difference. Oh, to feel the heft of that gatling gun in our virtual hands as we ride shotgun in our battle jeep! To skip grenades across the water like stones on a beach! To skim across the ground in the hover bike-thingie! Okay. We'll calm down. But last year's E3 was all about HALO. And this revolutionary-looking action game from the makers of MYTH is so exciting, they just may do it again.



Oni

As if HALO weren't enough, Bungie West's big thang, ONI, will be shown at E3 as well. While we were hoping to see ONI released already, it was pushed back so that the team could properly finish the single-player game. Konoko, ONI's purple-coiffed heroine, has come a long way and now seems to be entering the home-stretch of her journey to stardom. We hope that ONI shows off its glory at E3; the past few public appearances have been a bit stale due to repetitive gameplay demos. Plus, there's always some 12-year-old who's hogging a demo rig and playing ONI for 6 hours straight, never once letting the people whose job it is to review this stuff near it. But we're not bitter. The little bastard.

The Dreamland Chronicles: Freedom Ridge

Genre: Strategy • Developer: Mythos Games • Publisher: Bethesda Softworks
Release Date: Q4 00

There's not an editor in our offices who didn't burn away significant hours of their life eliminating the alien hordes in X-COM: UFO DEFENSE. That's why we can't wait to see how FREEDOM RIDGE is coming along. It may not be an "official" X-COM sequel, but, as the only X-COM-type game being made by the original creators Mythos Games, it's the alien-hunting game that's dominating our radar.

Bethesda Softworks has assured us that the game will retain all of the character-building, research, and tactical squad combat that made X-COM a CGW Hall of Famer. But FREEDOM RIDGE promises to be even more intense, as gamers will be waging an all-out war against aliens who've already taken over our planet, forcing the requisite "Rag-Tag Band of Scrappy Fighters" to seize, steal, or capture every bit of tech and weaponry in the game. Other additions to the tried-and-true include a 3D engine to ladle up all sorts of spiffy lighting effects and deformable terrain, and a much more involved plot involving Area 51, a couple of alien races, the shadowy Men in Black, and more.

We'll be using E3 as an opportunity to make sure Mythos isn't screwing with the core gameplay the way X-COM: APOCALYPSE did. You can count on more coverage for this alien baby as soon as we know more.

Combat Flight Simulator 2

Microsoft wants to take you for a tour of the Pacific. A WWII tour-of-duty, that is. Their upcoming COMBAT FLIGHT SIMULATOR 2: WWII PACIFIC THEATER (CFS2) revisits the Pacific Theater, an infrequently-visited part of WWII by flight sims. CFS2's combination of detailed plane and flight models, better wingman intelligence, a graphical mission editor, and weather effects could help breathe new life into the beleaguered flight-sim genre.

Microsoft is including carrier-based WWII-vintage planes like Grumman's F-4F Wildcat, the F-6F Hellcat, the Dauntless Dive-bomber, the Japanese A6M2 Zero, and latter WWII birds such as the F4U-1A Corsair. To help make the environment more immersive, CFS2 will create its terrain using data from the U.S. Geological Survey. And CFS2 is looking to implement smarter wingman AI, where you'll get status updates after giving them orders. And – true to life – they won't always be there to come to your rescue.

Microsoft is planning to include 120 missions (playing either the Japanese or the American side) and eight-player multiplayer support, both over LAN and Internet.

Neverwinter Nights

If Bioware delivers on their plans for NEVERWINTER NIGHTS, it could be the last role-playing game you'll ever need.

NEVERWINTER NIGHTS is a mammoth project; think of it as three games in one. First, it's a single-player role-playing game using a brand-new 3D engine and the new Third Edition *Dungeons & Dragons* rules.

Second, it's a tool kit that will allow you to roll your own *D&D* adventures – design your own dungeon, populate it with monsters, write your own scripts for NPC behavior, and even create your own cinematic cut-scenes. In multiplayer mode, there will be tools to allow a Dungeon Master to choreograph adventures on the fly, just like the good 'ol days of pen-and-paper *D&D*.

Finally, it could be the mother of all massively-multiplayer role-playing games. Game worlds supporting 64 players can be set up on Internet servers, and servers can be connected to others servers through "portals" in the game worlds. If the game takes off, we could see hundreds of game worlds linked together into one monstrous life-draining vortex of RPG mania. Count us in.

Baldur's Gate 2: Shadows Of Amn

Bioware will also be showing off the sequel to that little game called BALDUR'S GATE, which has sold nearly one-million copies since its release two years ago – an unbelievable statistic for a hardcore *AD&D* role-playing game. BALDUR'S GATE 2: SHADOWS OF AMN promises to improve on every single aspect of the first game, including higher-resolution graphics, brand-new class kits, and a variety of new environments – including a journey to the Underdark. Bioware has said that the first game was just a warmup for this one, and those mad geniuses up in Canada have an annoying tendency to be right most of the time. Count us in again.

KISS: Psycho Circus

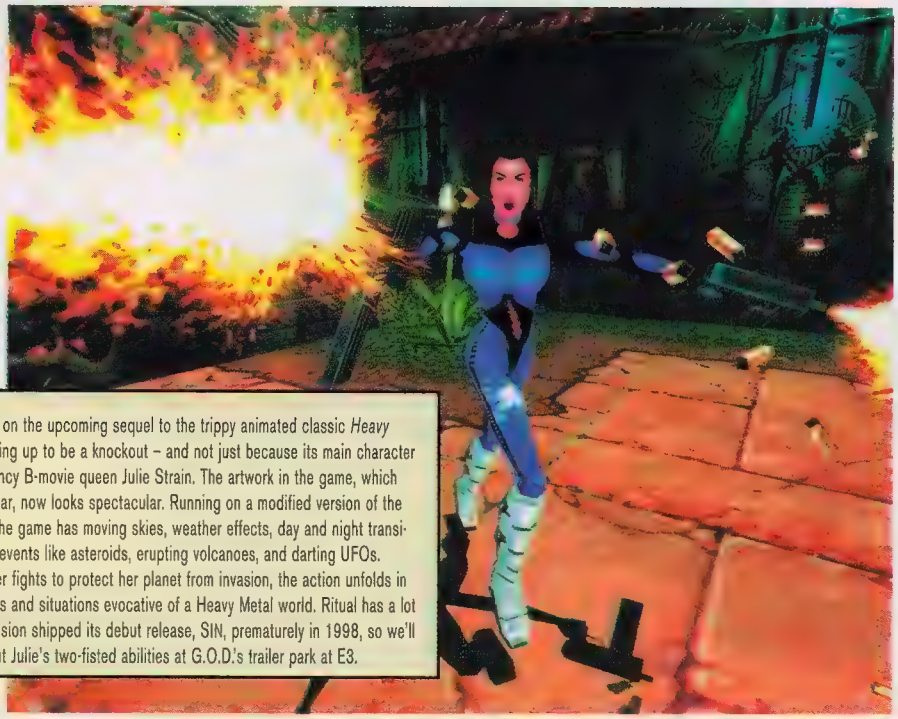
Unfortunately, in this business, the easiest way to predict the hottest games at E3 is to review last year's best games that never shipped. The Gathering of Developers has three such games – MAX PAYNE, KISS: PSYCHO CIRCUS, and HEAVY METAL: FAKK 2 – that wowed the press last year and still aren't finished. The waiting is killing us and they all stand out for different reasons.

KISS: PSYCHO CIRCUS: THE NIGHTMARE CHILD has always impressed us despite its celebrity license. The story is appropriately weird/stupid, set in a demonic world based on Todd McFarlane's *Psycho Circus* comic books. You have to prevent an unseen evil from being born by traveling to different dimensions to collect armor items that let you become a 10-foot tall "God of Thunder" who can kick ass with steel-plated, thigh-high boots. Okay.

Despite this, the game looks great and promises loads of action. The developer, Third Law Interactive, boasts some of the best talent that ever walked out of Ion Storm, and they are striving to deliver an adrenaline-pumping experience with swarms of creatures all coming after you at once. Scheduled for release in May, this could be some of the summer's best entertainment.

Heavy Metal

FAKK 2



FAKK 2, based on the upcoming sequel to the trippy animated classic *Heavy Metal*, is shaping up to be a knockout – and not just because its main character looks like bouncy B-movie queen Julie Strain. The artwork in the game, which looked good last year, now looks spectacular. Running on a modified version of the QUAKE III engine, the game has moving skies, weather effects, day and night transitions, and scripted events like asteroids, erupting volcanoes, and darting UFOs.

As your character fights to protect her planet from invasion, the action unfolds in surreal environments and situations evocative of a Heavy Metal world. Ritual has a lot to prove after Activision shipped its debut release, SIN, prematurely in 1998, so we'll be sure to check out Julie's two-fisted abilities at G.O.D.'s trailer park at E3.

Genre: Action • Publisher: G.O.D. • Developer: Ritual Entertainment • Release date: Q3 00

Max Payne

MAX PAYNE was a buzz title at last year's E3, but we hadn't heard much since. Given its development in Finland, some of that's expected. The latest report from Helsinki suggests that Remedy is making it one of the grittiest 3D-shooters ever.

Visually, the game is much improved with character models that approach photo-realism; layered-on textures allow for realistic clothing movement and progressive damage states. And if Max gets raked in a shootout, he'll limp like a guy who's been shot.

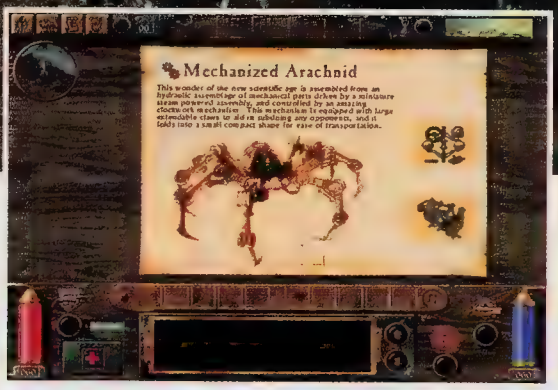
Remedy is also striving for exceptional physics accuracy. Weapons and bullets will behave just as in real life, says project lead Petri Järvilehto. Fire at a distant target, and your shot will hit lower than where you aimed. Ricochets will add another dimension to indiscriminate hails of gunfire. The game's high-end particle effects support volumetric muzzle flashes, fire, and smoke.

Combine this with Max's ability to dodge and shoot in mid-air, and you've got a cinematic-style 3D shooter. Can you say *The Matrix*? How about John Woo? We can't wait to see MAX again this year.

Arcanum:

of Steamworks and Magick Obscura

Genre: RPG • Developer: Troika Games • Publisher: Sierra • Release Date: Q4 00


Mechanized Arachnid
This wonder of the new scientific age is assembled from an hydraulic assemblage of mechanical parts driven by a miniature steam powered assembly, and controlled by an amazing clockwork mechanism. This mechanism is equipped with large extendable claws to aid in subduing any opponents, and it folds into a small compact shape for ease of transportation.

There are only two times we get excited by elves: when mentioned in the same breath as madman Peter Jackson's upcoming film adaptation of *The Lord Of The Rings*, and when they're not presented as the usual pointy-eared pansies that *AD&D* has molded them to be. So when the ARCANUM team stuck a gun on an elf, they had our strict attention.

Okay, there are better reasons for us to get excited about seeing this at E3. We can start with the development team: the same fellas who provided the foundation for both FALLOUT games. They've taken their talent of creating unique settings, and applied it to putting a spin on a cliche: traditional fantasy tainted by an Industrial Revolution. Dragons and zeppelins, conjured beasts and steam-driven automatons; these are just some of the zany and interesting mixes that will be brought to the game.

We can yammer on and on about the other features we're anxious to see in action: Skill-based character development that goes even further than FALLOUT's. A big world with sensible side-quests, and all the time one could want to finish the game (read: no time limit). A combat system that caters to both turn-based traditionalists and real-time click-jockeys. Heck, we don't really know what they'll do with multiplayer, but that's something we're going to ask at the show.

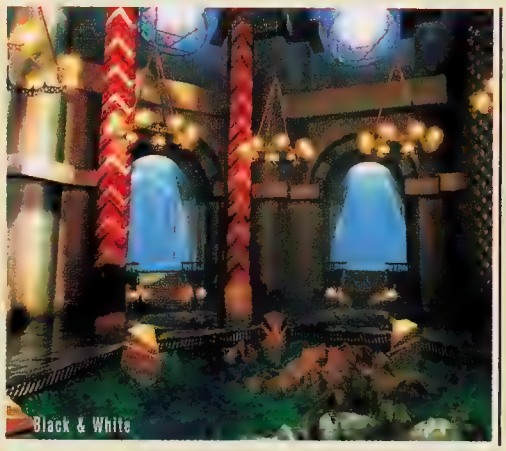
So yeah, they tempt us with a gun-toting elf, and we're biting come E3.

More E3 Hopefuls

There will, of course, be tons more games on display at E3 than those highlighted on the previous pages. A great many of those will suck, and we will actively try to avoid them. But there will also be plenty of other contenders to greatness out there, too. Here are a few more games we're looking forward to checking out.

Black & White

This is the year we hope to see the realization of Peter Molyneux's dream project in the form of honest-to-god gameplay. As intriguing a concept as BLACK & WHITE is, it's flirting with the possibility of being labeled a really cool technology demo and nothing more. Lionhead Studios has been tantalizing us for close to two years, and we're hoping this is the year they come through – if only because we can't wait to play the game.


Black & White

Return to Castle Wolfenstein

Think of CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN in an Old Testament kind of way – this is the game that begat DOOM which begat QUAKE, etc. Now it's getting a brand-spankin'-new update with 3D acceleration and all the other hardware/processor benefits we enjoy in this brave new millennium. Our chief interest at E3 is in finding out just what is up with this game – developers Gray Matter and id Software are being very secretive about WOLF since our first (very promising) peek months ago.

Alice

We're eager to see the progress on ALICE, the twisted 3D shooter from former id Software boy-toy American McGee. Lewis Carroll's sweet little girl has been beaten with the puberty stick, and is worse for it. Armored in Goth cynicism and toting Wonderland weapons, the teenage Alice will skip through a trippy 3D world littered with characters and locales drawn from her childhood memories. It sounds cool. But does it work as a game? We'll play it and let you know.

E3 Hardware Hitlist

Microsoft Strategic Commander

Most new game controllers on the market address one of three functions: steering, flying or mouse-looking. But with the advent of 3D strategy games, and ever-growing numbers of units to control, Microsoft set out to design a controller to make keeping things under control a lot easier. The result? The new Strategic Commander, a left-handed USB gaming controller designed specifically for strategy games. This new controller allows you to navigate map and camera movements, and also enhances mouse functionality.

Strategic Commander has six buttons, three modifiers, and profile switching combine for 72 possible key mappings. In addition, it also has record on-the-fly key mappings and on-the-fly profile switching facilitate quick adjustments with each new circumstance. The entire part of the controller that your hand rests on can be moved forward/backward/left right and twisted left/right to control camera movement, while your fingers remain in their "home row." For titles like Homeworld, Age of Empires 2 and Ground Control, this controller may be just the ticket. After we get our hands on one for review, we'll let you know.

Strategic Commander

Nvidia's GeForce 2 (NV-15)

On the hardware front, the E3 show-stealer is likely to be nVidia's new GeForce 2, which until recently went under the code-name NV-15. The GeForce 2 will pack quite a wallop in terms of both horsepower and new features. On the horsepower side of things, nVidia is anticipating delivering 800Mpixels per second of pixel fill rate. Plus, each of the GeForce 2's four pixel pipelines can draw two textures per pixel per clock, so the texture fill rate is a frightening 1.6Gtexels per second (a texel is a textured pixel). This is a huge boon for games that do multi-texturing or multi-pass rendering effects.

nVidia has also improved upon GeForce's transform-and-lighting (T/L) geometry engine, and nVidia is expecting to see a peak triangle rate upwards of 25 million triangles per second. This feature has been the source of some controversy in the 3D world because competitors have argued that few games have actually used the feature. But all the major 3D chip players–ATi, 3dfx and Matrox–have parts in the works that will accelerate T/L, and will ship this fall or holiday season. S3's Savage4 already supports the feature. And that support, coupled with the presence of Intel's SSE and AMD's 3DNow instruction sets, means that Fall 2000 games will likely support this feature.

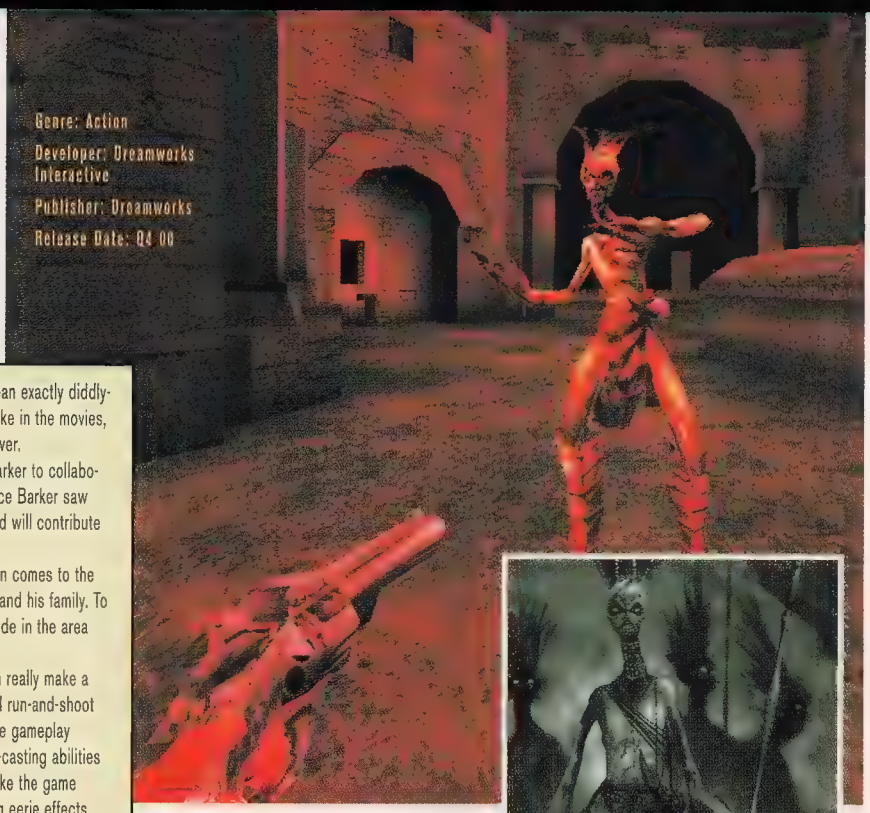
Intel's Willamette CPU

Despite their troubles with RAMBUS availability and higher-speed CPUs, 1999 was a very good year for Intel. And this despite the fact that much of their Pentium-III architecture is the same as that of the original Pentium Pro that shipped nearly five years ago. AMD has been putting a lot of heat on Intel in the battle for X86 CPU supremacy, but Intel is about to add some heat of their own with their newest 32-bit Intel Architecture (IA-32) processor, code-named Willamette.

With this new 32-bit processor, Intel has innovated in several key areas. Willamette's front-side bus speed has been tripled to 3.2GB/sec. That's quite a leap. And Intel's new chipset for Willamette, code-named Tehama, will support dual-channel RAMBUS, and this configuration's peak data rate can achieve the same 3.2GB/sec. At the Intel Developers' Forum, Intel was showing a Willamette CPU running at 1.5GB/sec, and while the Pentium-III will also likely hit that speed, Willamette's architecture lends itself better to higher clock rates, and will be Intel's high-performance 32-bit processor.

The Undying

Genre: Action
Developer: Dreamworks Interactive
Publisher: Dreamworks
Release Date: Q4 00



All the fancy, newfangled, three-dee graphics in the world mean exactly diddly-squat when it comes to scaring the pants off gamers. Just like in the movies, scaring people is more about technique than computing power.

This explains why Dreamworks Interactive has enlisted Clive Barker to collaborate on their upcoming 3D shooter/horror-fest, THE UNDYING. Once Barker saw the game's engine and the script, he got onboard in a big way, and will contribute to the game's cut-scenes and horror-inducing techniques.

THE UNDYING is a Celtic horror story set in 1923: A young man comes to the aid of his friend by stomping out a curse that has fallen upon him and his family. To accomplish this, you have to destroy each of his siblings, who reside in the area surrounding the family's Irish mansion.

Key to THE UNDYING's success – and this is where Barker can really make a difference – is preventing the game from devolving into a standard run-and-shoot 3D shooter. Realizing this, Dreamworks is working feverishly on the gameplay mechanics. Your character can use conventional weapons or spell-casting abilities that improve as the game goes on. While graphics alone won't make the game great, the game's engine is robust and easily capable of producing eerie effects, both during the gameplay and in-engine cut-scenes.

If THE UNDYING, which should be on store shelves in November, comes together, the end result could be the PC horror equivalent of *The Sixth Sense*.

More E3 Hopefuls

Crimson Skies

We're still high on CRIMSON SKIES from Microsoft and FASA Interactive. In the tradition of Biggles, Snoopy, and the Rocket Ranger, CRIMSON SKIES brings bi-plane fantasy and propeller dreams to your PC. Take on the air pirates, down the zeppelins, even sky-jack a bomber (yeah, you'll hop on the wing, knock on the window, and throw the pilot out)! The fanciful becomes plausible with a fabulously-fun flight model and planes that could make a grown aeronautics engineer wet himself.

Ground Control

GROUND CONTROL is a new 3D RTS from Massive Entertainment that eschews certain conventions like base-building and resource harvesting for more tactical elements of combat, a la MYTH. Units are grouped into unbreakable squads of infantry, armored vehicles, or aircraft that accumulate experience over missions. Graphically, it's a stunner, with nicely detailed animations like exhaust plumes, flying shell casings, and ballistic recoil. If it plays as good as it looks, GROUND CONTROL is sure to be a winner.

Commandos 2

1998's COMMANDOS, a squad-based real-time strategy set during WWII, intrigued us before release, but the final product didn't rise far enough above repetitive puzzle-solving to earn an endorsement. COMMANDOS 2 not only looks better – with 3D-rendered characters and vehicles on top of static-rendered backgrounds, outdoors, and 3D interiors – but it looks like it will play a lot better with more paths to victory and a more open style of gameplay. Here's hoping the second time is a charm.

C&C Renegade and Red Alert 2

Westwood is looking forward to E3, where they'll have a chance to respond to critics' accusations of complacency with two new Command & Conquer games. RENEGADE is

More E3 Hopefuls

their third-person 3D shooter in which you take control of C&C's Commando unit and make your way through objective-based missions. Shown behind closed doors last year, this incredible-looking action/strategy game lost some of its thunder due to Bungie's HALO, but should open some eyes this year. Also on display will be RED ALERT 2, a real-time strategy sequel that Westwood assures us will make up for their slightly disappointing release of TIBERIAN SUN late last year. Although the engine is the same as in C&C 2, RED ALERT 2's design team is emphasizing more wide open, action-packed play.

Throne Of Darkness

How cool does this sound? A samurai RPG set in feudal Japan, inspired by Akira Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood*. Doron Gartner and Ben Haas of Blizzard thought it was so cool that they started their own company, Click Entertainment, to create the game – now called THRONE OF DARKNESS. After some turmoil (the game was originally with Acclaim, now with Sierra), the RPG is on track, and Sierra will be giving journalists a peek at E3. We're pumped for anything samurai, so we'll check it out for sure.

New Legends

Speaking of Asian-style RPGs, we're hoping to get a peek at the still-mysterious NEW LEGENDS. All we know about the game right now is that Justin Chin is behind it. He was the driving force behind JEDI KNIGHT, and some of the things we've been hearing about NEW LEGENDS are: an even greater emphasis on swordfighting, and a setting described as "*Blade Runner* in China."

And In This Issue...

Of course, we're extremely excited to see all the big-name titles covered elsewhere in this issue (so go read about them right now): LucasArts' OBI-WAN, Blizzard's WARCRAFT III, and MECHCOMMANDER 2 and MECHWARRIOR 4 from Microsoft/FASA.

read.me

INSIDE

- X-BOX vs PLAYSTATION 2
- AOE II Expansion
- Havas Loses Lord of the Rings?
- GASP! Payola in the game biz?

X-Box: The Empire Strikes Back

Microsoft Takes On the PlayStation 2

What Are They Saying?

"Our focus is on gaming. We're building the most kick-ass game console in the world, that's our focus."
Ed Fries, General Manager, Microsoft Games Division

"The raw power of X-Box coupled with great game design will enable the games industry to fulfill its potential of becoming truly mass market."
Peter Molyneux, founder, Lionhead Studios

Just when you thought the PlayStation 2 was going to own the living room, Microsoft has struck back, big-time. In early March, while *Newsweek* splashed the PlayStation 2 on its cover and all but declared it the winner in the next-gen console wars, Bill Gates announced Microsoft's first dedicated gaming system. With specifications exceeding those of the fastest PCs and the PlayStation 2, the announcement served its purpose and got game developers excited about designing for it. Now, the questions remain: What will this mean to PC gaming, and how well will Microsoft's first consumer electronics device compete with Sony's power player?

Don't Fear the X-Box

For most computer gamers, X-Box won't really matter that much. Microsoft is clear that it's a dedicated console system for the living room. They're focusing on games that appeal to console gamers' tastes, rather than on complex strategy games or simulations. The X-Box will ship with a USB gamepad, and although a keyboard and mouse will be optional, they are not being emphasized. In addition, the X-Box won't allow upgrades. While X-Box will be screaming fast when it ships next fall, Microsoft doesn't plan to update the architecture for four to five years. During that time, technology on the PC will likely leave the X-box behind.

Microsoft's vice president in charge of the X-Box, Robbie Bach, said as much in an interview after Gates' announcement. "We're definitely committed to PC gaming," he said. "It's the place that drives a lot of innovation. Four or five years from now when we're designing the second generation X-Box, we'll be able to take that new technology

BALL BUSTER This interactive demo showed realistic physics modeling of more than 100 mouse traps set with ping pong balls – at 60 frames per second.

edited by jeff_green@zd.com

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RP
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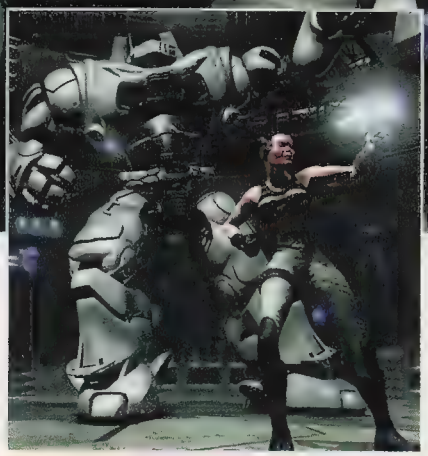
News & Notes... Take Two Interactive has bought The Gathering of Developers for an undisclosed sum. The Gathering, which sought to give more control to developers, ran out of money after most of its games slipped more than a year.



PS2 KILLER? The X-Box's rendering and anti-aliasing abilities blew game developers away at the recent Game Developers Conference. Microsoft claims that this demo uses about one-third of X-Box's capabilities.

and build it into the next device. In addition to that, we think that the PC games market is going to continue to be a great market."

But for console gamers, X-Box is big news. Powered by a Pentium III-class chip and an Nvidia graphics processor three generations beyond today's fastest Geforce 256, the X-Box will be the fastest console system ever. If the machine ships as specified, it will be twice as powerful as Sony's PlayStation 2, with better polygon rendering and anti-aliasing features. It'll run on a stripped down version of Windows 2000, but users will never even see Windows or have to configure it. You'll turn it on and the game will come up.

The X-box boasts a console first: an 8GB hard drive for downloading demos and add-ons. Games will be saved on an 8MB memory card, the same as on a PlayStation 2. DVD movie playback will be built into the X-Box, whereas you'll need a utility on the PS2's memory card to watch movies.

Perhaps the biggest difference between X-Box and PlayStation 2 is their Internet strategy. Sony sees the PS2 as an all-in-one Internet device that delivers online gaming, e-commerce, and Web browsing, as well as downloadable music, software and video. Microsoft has emphasized that

"As a developer [X-Box] makes huge sense to me, and as a consumer it makes huge sense to me. I also like...that X-Box is not trying to be the "be-all end-all" for the Internet, because a TV is not a very good way to do that. I've got a Dreamcast and I tried their Web browser and...I'm never going to do that again."

Gabe Newell, Managing Director, Valve Software

"I don't think [X-Box] will affect the PC-gaming market that much. People who buy PCs don't just buy them for games—they buy them to surf the net, for word processing, and for the gobs of different (non-game related) software and tools that can be used. I think that X-Box is going to bring a whole bunch of great games to people who couldn't otherwise afford a high-end PC."

Cliff Bleszinski, Lead Designer, Epic Games

SPEC SHOWDOWN

X-Box vs. PlayStation 2

	X-Box	PlayStation 2
CPU	633MHz or faster Pentium III	300MHz MIPS
Graphics processor	300MHz custom Nvidia chip	150MHz Sony GS
Memory (RAM)	64MB	38MB
Polygon performance	300 million triangles/sec	66 million triangles/sec
Storage	4x DVD, 8GB hard disk, 8MB memory card	2x DVD, 8MB memory card
I/O	4 controllers, USB, 10/100 Ethernet	2 controllers, USB, Firewire, PCMCIA
Broadband enabled	Yes	Future upgrade
Modem	Optional 56KB USB	Not planned
U.S. launch	Fall 2001	Fall 2000
Price	N/A	$300

Why X-box? Fear Powers Microsoft's First Entertainment System

After working at Microsoft for 13 years, Gabe Newell, now general director at Valve Software (HALF-LIFE), has unique insight into what motivates his old employer. Here's his perspective on the impetus behind X-Box.

"I know Sony scared Microsoft. They scared Microsoft and they scared Intel. I don't think that the guys at Microsoft right now view X-Box as 'Ooh, there's a new market, let's go get it!' They view it as Sony fired a shot across their bow and threatened their core business. When you're talking with Microsoft about X-Box, they're talking billions of dollars. They're not talking like, 'Oh, let's go spend $40 million to put a team in place to go get this.' They're basically saying, 'Okay, we've got $19 billion in the bank, and Sony is going after the crown jewels.' This is as much to protect the Windows business and the Office business and all of their other businesses.

Sony seemed to be deliberately trying to get the attention of Intel and Microsoft with all their comments like, 'PlayStation 2 is not only a game device, it's going to take over Internet commerce for consumers.' I know [Intel's] Andy Grove took the whole thing incredibly seriously and views it as one of the biggest threats to their business. And I know Bill [Gates] and Steve [Ballmer] take it incredibly seriously and view X-box as, 'This is what we've GOT to do to protect the businesses we're already in. We are protecting the cubs.'"

X-Box is for gaming, and that they won't include an Internet browser with it.

Up the Hill Backwards

Even if Microsoft's strategy is perfect, they face a bruising battle with Sony. One in four U.S. households already have a PlayStation, and the fact that PS2 is backwards-compatible with the 400 existing PlayStation titles is a huge plus. The PS2 will have a year's head start on the X-Box, and there are already about 250 PS2 titles in development. No console manufacturer has ever succeeded in dominating the video-game market twice, but that's likely to change this time. Analysts expect Sony to sell 100 million units—25 million more than the original PlayStation.

But Microsoft has one major ace up its sleeve: It's easier to program for X-Box than the PlayStation 2. Says Valve Software's Gabe Newell, "You can use a PC very easily as a development environment, the APIs are really familiar. The PlayStation 2 is really fast, but it's also really, really hard. You can take existing PC code and put it on a PS2, and it will run a lot slower. Or you can take PC code and put it on X-Box, and it will run insanely fast. You're not trying to get these weird vectoring units to go really fast (as on the PS2); it's Win32 and OpenGL, with DirectX 8 APIs. You don't have to relearn how to do graphics just to draw a box on the screen."

Several PC developers and publishers have already announced support for X-Box, including EA, Hasbro, Activision, Bungie, and Sierra. Japanese developers like Konami, Capcom, Koei, and Namco have also signed on. Expect many more to join them in the months ahead.–*Ken Brown*

Reality Check

	CGW	PC Gamer	CGM	PCXL	Gamespot	Gamecenter	Average
Battlezone II	B+	C+	C-	B-	C+	*	C+
Crusaders of Might & Magic	D-	*	B-	F	C	C	C-
Final Fantasy VIII	D-	C+	B+	C	C+	B-	C
Mortyr	F	D+	C	C-	F	F	D-
Nox	B-	A-	B+	B+	B+	B+	B+
Pro Pinball: Fantastic Journey	A	B+	*	B+	B	B+	B+
South Park Rally	B-	F	D-	F	F	F	F+
The Sims	A+	A+	A	A	A	A	A
Urban Chaos	B-	C	B+	B+	B+	C	B-
Wild Wild West	D-	C	C	D-	C-	B-	C-

And the Winner Is... THE SIMS, which scored a near perfect grade in our new, revamped Reality Check, which converts the various game publications' rating systems into a letter grade. NOX and FANTASTIC JOURNEY were deemed "pretty good" across the board; and the collective spittle of reviewers fell heavily upon MORTYR, CRUSADERS OF MIGHT & MAGIC, and SOUTH PARK RALLY.

5, 10, 15 Years Ago in CGW

15

June 1985

Happy 15th birthday to LucasArts, which made its gaming debut in 1985 with the release of two creative action games, BALLBLAZER and RESCUE ON FRACTALUS. Our reviewer said, "I found more craftsmanship, more fantasy-making in the instruction manual to these games than I've found in most games themselves"—a statement one could make regarding many games from LucasArts since.

10

June 1990

Our editorial this month commented on one of the creepier moments in gaming history. In March of 1990, the offices of Steve Jackson Games were raided by a band of technologically ignorant and overeager Secret Service agents who confiscated documents and computer equipment. Their justification was Steve Jackson's development of the GURPS Cyberpunk role-playing game, which agents referred to as "a handbook for computer crime." The SS never admitted any error.

5

June 1995

Remember editing your AUTO EXEC.BAT? IRQ conflicts? Memory managers? Most of these problems were on their way out as of five years ago. Our resident gear-head Loyd Case nearly soiled himself describing the glory of the new operating system, Windows 95. While all is still not rosy in the land of technology and gaming, there's no doubt that Win 95 saved gaming from being strangled in its own technological web.

News & Notes... Think you can make a better game? Valve recently released Half-Life SDK 2.0, which lets gamers create their own RPGs, strategy games, and even flight sims. Best of all, it's free. **www.valvesoftware.com**

Q&A With Verant's John Smedley

Verant CEO on EVERQUEST Woes and Star Wars Multiplayer Games

CGW PROFILE

Verant Interactive's profile has been higher than usual this month, with the imminent release of the EVERQUEST expansion pack (see our sneak preview elsewhere in this issue), the announcement of their *Star Wars* massively-multiplayer game, and a rather vocal revolt amongst many EVERQUEST players over a number of problems they see with the game. We caught up with Verant's CEO, John Smedley, to get the official lowdown.

You're doing a *Star Wars* game! How did this relationship with LucasArts come about?

We were introduced to the LucasArts folks and it seemed to be a really good fit. They were looking for someone to do STAR WARS ONLINE and we seemed like the right people. I have to say they're really a lot of fun to work with, and I think the game is going to benefit greatly by the relationship that we're building with them.

first look

AOE II Expansion on the Way

The Renaissance technically occurs during the period covered by AGE OF EMPIRES II: THE AGE OF KINGS, but it doesn't begin in practice until the AGE II EXPANSION pack. That's when villagers – brimming with knowledge from a new era – will finally work autonomously after completing a mining or lumber camp. Not only that, but in this golden AGE, researchers have discovered renewable farms. If you've ever tired of sowing the land, you'll be happy to know you can soon queue up farms like units. It's a glorious time for the Empire!

Like the AGE I expansion (THE RISE OF ROME), AOE II: THE CONQUERORS will introduce more than just a few new maps and units. Ensemble will introduce five new civilizations, historical conquerors and campaigns, 11 new units, and 25 new technologies. The civilizations are the Huns, Spanish, Aztecs, Mayans, and Koreans. Four new campaigns feature the historical conquerors El Cid, Attila the Hun, Montezuma, and Eric the Red.

The new units include halberdiers (wielding a combination of spear and battle axe), hussars (light cavalry), and petards (satchel charge bombers). The elite Korean unit is an iron-clad ship called the turtle boat. It's an oar-powered battleship with cannon that moves slowly, but is hard to kill and very destructive.

Expect quite a bit of new artwork. The Mayan and Aztec campaigns take place in the New World, so Ensemble's creating a new Meso-American building set. There are also a variety of new map types to play on, including maps in the shapes of actual countries. If you get tired of those, you can design your own maps with the editor. Look for the game this fall. *–Ken Brown*

They've got people who can answer any question about *Star Wars* that you could possibly come up with and that's an amazing resource to have.

We know you can't say too much at this point, but how will your experience with EVERQUEST prepare you for STAR WARS?

I'm not sure anything can prepare us for STAR WARS, but having done a successful massively-multiplayer game is going to give us a good place to start. It's amazing to us how much of a cultural icon *Star Wars* is, and we're going to have to rise to the occasion to keep to the quality level that *Star Wars* fans will demand.

Can you tell us why Verant decided not to do a MM *Star Trek* game? [as previously reported—Ed.]

We felt it was important to give *Star Wars* the attention it deserves and we didn't feel that we could handle doing both games.

How's SOVEREIGN coming along?

SOVEREIGN is coming along amazingly. I literally just got back from watching a battle with around 700 units (with around 9 players) in a massive artillery battle. We're working heavily on combat at this point and we'll be able to show it off at E3.

Has the success of EQ, over 200,000 players now, surprised you?

Honestly, yes it has. We always knew EVERQUEST was an amazing game but the response has been phenomenal. It seems to have struck the right chord with gamers. I'm also really pleased to see EQ, ULTIMA ONLINE, and ASHERON'S CALL co-exist, which brings the total number of gamers playing these games to around half a million.

Some players have been complaining about overcrowded servers and unresponsive game masters, and have gone to the trouble to write complaint emails to gaming magzines and Web sites. What's your reaction to all this?

The complaints regarding the overcrowded servers are 100% fair. We have targeted 1500 people per server during prime time and currently it's a lot higher than that. What people aren't aware of is how much work it is for us to put up more servers. You don't go out and buy these machines at Comp USA. They are specially built and we also have a lot of preparation to do, bandwidth-wise, to make sure we don't congest our bandwidth. We currently have four more servers planned to be put up by April 24th (the launch date of KUNARK). We will be moving people off of some of the crowded servers to the new ones to help alleviate the problem. In regard to the GM's, these complaints are also valid and mostly come from needing more of them. We're adding staff to handle this now.

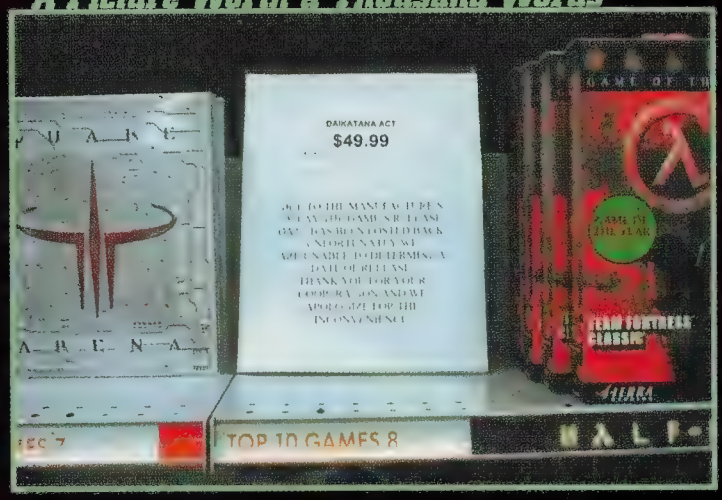
Overall, my reaction to the complaints is to apologize, and then to make darn sure we do something about it. We recognize clearly that we need to keep our customers happy, and we're working day and night to do just that. *—Interview by Mark Asher*

Lawsuit Dismissed

On April 7th, U.S. District Judge Edward Johnstone dismissed a lawsuit filed against a group of entertainment companies (including heavy hitters like Sony, Sega, and Nintendo) by families of three of the victims of a December 1997 school shooting in Paducah, Kentucky. The federal judge dismissed the $33 million-dollar suit on the basis that the video-game makers couldn't predict what 14-year-old gunman Michael Carneal (currently serving life in prison) would do, and that the games are media not subject to product-liability law. Wrote Johnstone in his opinion, "This was a tragic situation, but tragedies such as this simply defy rational explanation and the courts should not pretend otherwise." Also named in the suit were various companies involved in the making of the film, *The Basketball Diaries*, including Time-Warner Inc., Polygram Film Entertainment, and New Line Cinema.

The families plan to appeal. *–Robert Coffey*

A Picture Worth a Thousand Words



The GOOD...

BASEBALL FEVER

Baseball mania has reached fever pitch at *CGW*. The beautiful new Pac Bell ballpark is just a few blocks away. Our second interoffice HIGH HEAT season is off and running (and this time, we're not letting the boss win). And our mighty, real-life softball team is pumped and ready to conquer. Never mind that 15-0 shellacking: We were, um, rusty.

The BAD...

MIGHT AND MAGIC OVERKILL

We love this franchise. Don't get us wrong. But after the mediocrity of CRUSADERS and the rather underwhelming MIGHT AND MAGIC VIII and HEROES III: THE SHADOW OF DEATH, we can't help but feel that 3DO is milking the franchise a little too much. Ease up on that money udder, guys.

and the UGLY

SOFTWARE RETAIL PAYOLA

The appearance of DAIKATANA on the "bestseller" racks of certain software chain-stores (see photo)—despite the fact that the game hasn't shipped yet—puts the spotlight on a slimy aspect of this business: that retailers will offer prime real estate in their stores for game companies willing to shell out the cash. Here's smoking-gun evidence that those "bestseller" spots are bought.

For the BioDerm Hordes,
the war is personal.
Humanity will perish...
Screaming.
RP
Visit www.esrb.org
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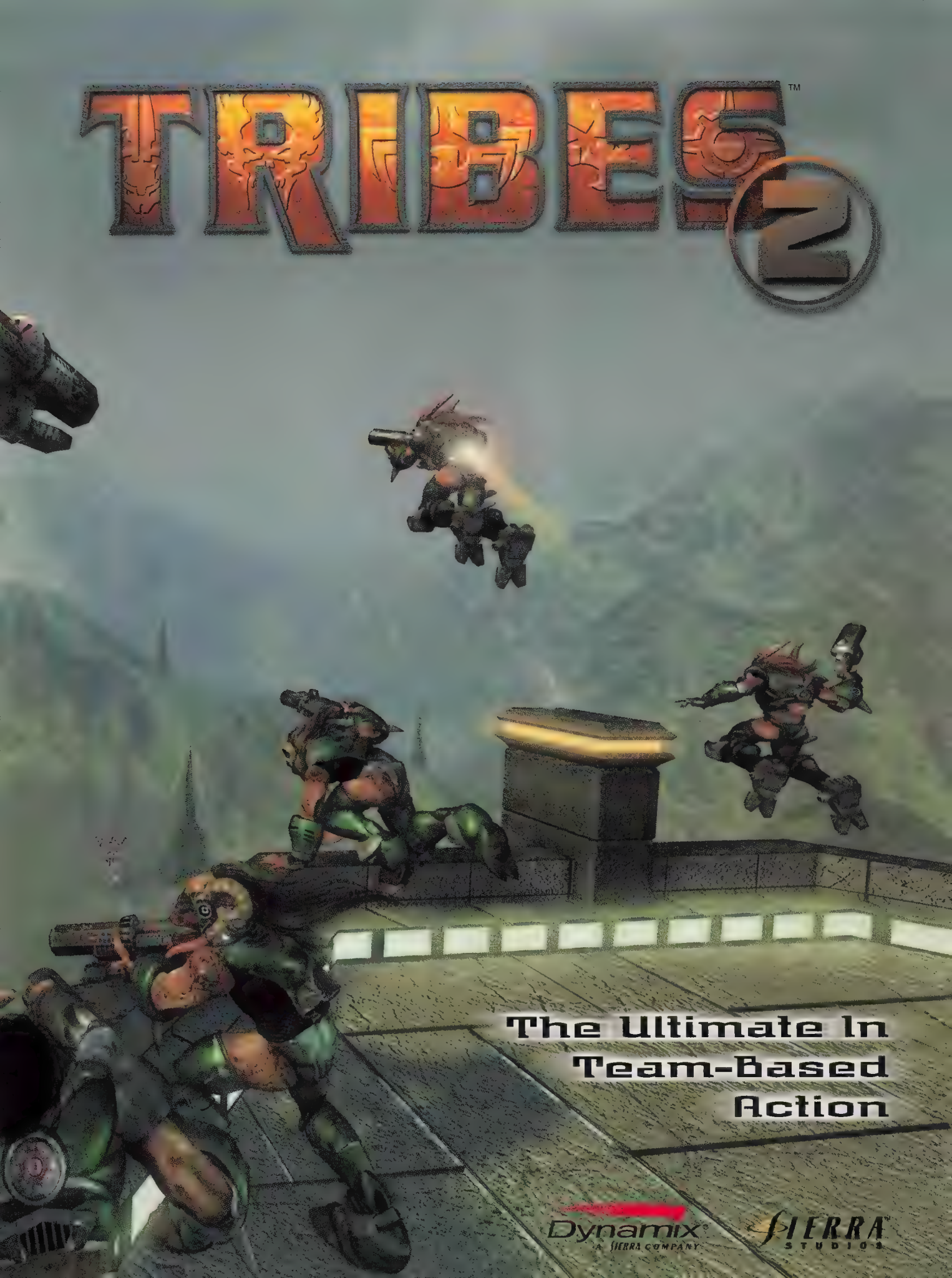
TRIBES 2
The Ultimate In Team-Based Action
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News & Notes.

Kate Botello, *CGW*'s beloved former Information Services babe and the best BAKU-BAKU player on the planet, is now the co-host of ZDTV's Gamespot TV. Join the fan club now.

STEALTH MODE

By Leonardo Di Sneakio

Three Rings for the Elven Kings under the sky,
Seven for the Dwarf Lords in their halls of stone,
Nine for Mortal Man, doomed to die,
One for the Dark Lord, on his dark throne.....

and one very attractive game license about to be yanked away from Havas Interactive, or so the rumors go. Yes, Havas dallied. They diddled. They fiddled while the *Lord of the Rings* movie was being filmed, and some one's mad enough to take back the Middle Earth license from them. Havas had contracted to produce a massively-multiplayer game based on Tolkien's Middle Earth mythos, a game which seems like a sure hit if they'd ever get around to making it. You may recall that MIDDLE EARTH ONLINE was underway, but then Havas pulled the plug as part of some corporate restructuring and laid off the development team. Havas said the project would be started from scratch, but apparently never got around to doing any scratching. As a result they are being stripped of the license, and if that's all that happens to them, they can count themselves lucky. Yes my preciousssss...they really blew this one.

By the time you read this, Interplay will have announced a new game and cancelled another one. ZEUS, the new game, is a city-builder along the lines of CAESAR 3 and PHARAOH, but with a bit of a more lighthearted feel to it. Set in ancient Greece, you can expect all the familiar Greek Gods, heroes, and monsters to make appearances. The game they are canceling is CIVIL WAR GENERAL 3. They just don't feel like they can do much that's new with that genre at this point.

continued on page 54

first look

PANTHEON: It's All Greek to Us

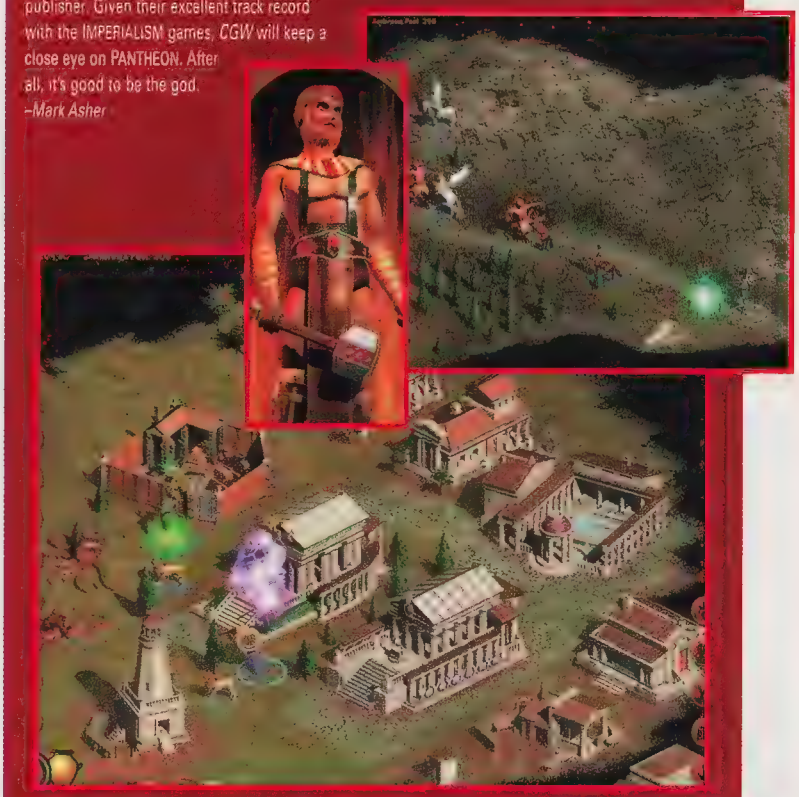
"It's good to be the god." Mel Brooks might say if he were playing an alpha build of PANTHEON, the newest game in the works from Frog City, makers of the highly regarded IMPERIALISM I and II.

In PANTHEON, players will take on the role of a Greek god. The game is a mix of a real-time strategy game and more traditional empire builders such as CIVILIZATION and CAESAR 3. Here, though, the chief resource is not gold, but worship of the gods. As in POPULOUS, you influence but do not directly control the native population.

Where PANTHEON begins to take that road less traveled is in its "research" and combat. Research is simply sending one of your Greek heroes on a quest. Think Prometheus bringing the secret of fire to humankind and you've got it. During the quest, the hero and his or her small party will engage in combat. Fighting will resemble that of BALDUR'S GATE, both from perspective and style. During combat, players will be able to summon mythological creatures and invoke the help of the Gods. Gameplay is pauseable at any time.

Frog City is currently looking at a first quarter 2001 delivery and are close to finalizing a deal with a publisher. Given their excellent track record with the IMPERIALISM games, *CGW* will keep a close eye on PANTHEON. After all, it's good to be the god.

–Mark Asher



Tchotchke of the Month

Tchotch·ke (choch'ke). Slang, from Yiddish: a cheap, showy trinket.

We haven't felt this domestic since weaning Scooter. Somehow tied into the MDK2 launch, this bright and shiny toaster from Interplay is probably the most useful tchotchke ever to land in the *CGW* offices. While the wide slots allegedly accommodate a wide variety of breads, we've found them to be the perfect size for administering heat conductivity tests on WILD WILD WEST discs and toasting to crispy, golden perfection the severed fingers of those foolhardy enough to cross us.

"Squadron, look out for stealth fighters."
"He's dead meat."
"Cover me, I gotta pay the pizza guy."
I can't shake them. Can I get some love over here?

THIS IS NO SOLO MISSION

Welcome to the universe of massive multiplayer space combat. Join your squadron online. Confront other civilizations. Play free on worldwide servers. Or fly in hundred-ship dogfights on Zone.com. Just keep in mind—those that fly alone, die alone. **www.microsoft.com/games/allegiance**

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E Animated Violence

Microsoft

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read.me

News & Notes... According to Blizzard, 138,000 people in North America signed up for the 1,000 spots in the DIABLO II beta test.

continued from page 52

Aeon Electronic Entertainment sailed into a minefield. They were working on SILENT HUNTER 2 for Mindscape/SSI, when Mindscape took the contract back from them. Aeon was in the middle of negotiations with Mindscape over a new contract and essentially worked for free for several months, under the expectation that they'd get a new deal. Instead, Mindscape ended the relationship and seized the working code, which included those free months of work. Sneaky knows sneaky when he sees it, and that is truly some sneaky stuff. Mindscape

Name Games: Apparently, a group of former Looking Glass employees aren't happy working at Hasbro Interactive and are attempting to form their own company....Composer Jeremy Soule is hot right now in the games industry. He did the rousing orchestral music for TOTAL ANNIHILATION and he's now been signed by both Gas Powered Games and Sierra Interactive to provide music for DUNGEON SIEGE and SOVEREIGN, respectively. Valve is working on an unannounced massively multiplayer action game for both the PC and PlayStation 2. Think TEAM FORTRESS or TRIBES with some RPG-like character building angles to a persistent world. Word has it that Gathering of Developers will be announcing two more Dreamcast titles and several PlayStation 2 titles between now and E3. One will be Edge of Reality's first original PS2 title. It's supposedly a massive undertaking that will be announced, but not revealed at E3....The Origin team that was working on PRIVATEER ONLINE has now been moved to ULTIMA ONLINE 3 – yes 3! The PRIVATEER project has been scuttled. ...Activision is working on a *Star Trek* game that places players in the role of captain of an elite commando team. Now the question is will this be more like COMMANDOS or RAINBOW 6?

pipeline

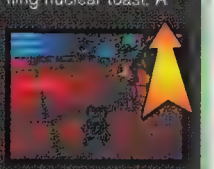
We know that game developers tend to use dartboards when determining release dates, so we broke out with even bigger dartboards for the Pipeline. Sometimes, we'll nail the release down to the month, other times we'll give the developers some breathing room by using a general season. Also, we'll highlight some of the more notable releases and pass some preliminary judgement on them before the real reviews are written. Lastly, if you're a publisher, make sure you tell us where your darts have been hitting, so that we're not completely blind, okay? Send notices to: cgwpipeline@zd.com

June Releases

MESSIAH: Shiny's baby angel has finally arrived, but it's plagued with hardware troubles/goofiness, and what little gameplay we could wring out before crashing has yielded mixed results. This could go either way.

NEED FOR SPEED: PORSCHE UNLEASHED Yeah, the intimate focus on one car could put people off. But we like Porsches, damit. Besides, we like the idea of the new "Unleashed" mode (training for crazy car stunts) and the refined career mode.

MDK 2: A four-armed dog with guns. A mad scientist with toasters that fling nuclear toast. A black-suited guy with a sniper's dream scope. Add more and more layers of zaniness, and you can see why we dig MDK 2.



	THEY SAY	WE SAY
UPDATE 4 x 4 Evolution G.O.D.	Summer 2000	Fall 2000
NEW Age Of Empires II Expansion Microsoft	Summer 2000	Fall 2000
American McGee's Alice EA	Winter 2000	Dec 2000
Arcanum Sierra	Summer 2000	Summer 2000
Baldur's Gate II: Shadows Of Amn Interplay	Summer 2000	Sept 2000
Black & White EA	Summer 2000	Fall 2000
Blair Witch Project(s) G.O.D.	Winter 2000	Spring 2001
Combat Flight Simulator 2 Microsoft	Winter 2000	Winter 2000
Comanche vs. Hokum Empire Interactive	Spring 2000	Summer 2000
Conquest: Frontier Wars Microsoft	Fall 2000	Fall 2000
Crimson Skies Microsoft	Summer 2000	Summer 2000
Dark Reign 2 Activision Spring 2000	Spring 2000	Spring 2000
Deus Ex Eidos	April 2000	June 2000
UPDATE Diablo II Blizzard	June 2000	August 2000
Duke Nukem Forever 3D Realms	Who Knows?	They ain't telling us
Dungeon Siege Microsoft	Fall 2000	Fall 2000
Evil Dead: Ashes 2 Ashes THQ	Fall 2000	Fall 2000
Felony Pursuit THQ	Spring 2000	Spring 2000
Fly!2K G.O.D.	Winter 2000	Dec 2000
Fly! II G.O.D.	Winter 2000	Spring 2001
Freelancer Microsoft	Winter 2000	Spring 2001
Giants: Citizen Kabuto Interplay	Winter 2000	Winter 2000
Good & Evil GT	Who knows?	Possibly canned
Ground Control Sierra Studios	Spring 2000	Summer 2000
Halo Bungie	Winter 2000	Winter 2000
Harpoon 4 SSI	Summer 2000	Summer 2000
Heavy Metal F.A.K.K. 2 GOD	Summer 2000	Fall 2000
Icewind Dale Interplay	June 2000	June 2000
Kingdom Under Fire G.O.D.	Summer 2000	Fall 2000
KISS: Psycho Circus G.O.D.	Summer 2000	Fall 2000
Loose Cannon Microsoft Winter 2000	Winter 2000	Winter 2000
Max Payne G.O.D.	Winter 2000	Feb 2001
NEW MechCommander 2 Microsoft	Spring 2000	Spring 2000

	THEY SAY	WE SAY
NEW MechWarrior 4 Microsoft	Fall 2000	Winter 2000
Motocross Madness 2 Microsoft	June 2000	June 2000
NEW NBA Inside Drive 2001 Microsoft	November 2000	November 2000
UPDATE Need for Speed: Motor City Electronic Arts	Winter 2000	They're way too secretive
UPDATE Neverwinter Nights Interplay	April 2001	Summer 2001
NEW NFL Fever 2001 Microsoft	August 2000	August 2000
Oni Bungie	Summer 2000	Fall 2000
Pool Of Radiance II SSI	Winter 2000	Winter 2000
Return To Wolfenstein Activision	November 2000	November 2000
Rock GT Interactive	Fall 2000	Possibly canned
Rune G.O.D.	Summer 2000	Fall 2000
Sanity Monolith	Summer 2000	Fall 2000
Settlers IV Blue Byte	Winter 2000	Winter 2000
Shogun: Total War EA	Spring 2000	Summer 2000
Sid Meier's Civilization III MicroProse	Winter 2000	Spring 2001
UPDATE Silent Hunter II SSI	Fall 2000	Fall 2000
SimMars Maxis	Fall 2000	Spring 2001
Simon The Sorceror 3D Southpeak Interactive	Summer 2000	Summer 2000
Sovereign Sony Online Entertainment	Winter 2000	Winter 2000
Star Trek DS9: The Fallen Simon & Schuster Interactive	August 2000	August 2000
Star Trek Voyager: Elite Force Activision	Spring 2000	Summer 2000
NEW Star Wars Episode I: Obi-Wan LucasArts	Fall 2000	Winter 2000
Summoner THQ	Fall 2000	Fall 2000
Tachyon: The Fringe Novalogic Spring 2000	Summer 2000	Summer 2000
Team Fortress 2 Sierra	Summer 2000	Just in Time For Christmas
The Longest Journey FunCom	Summer 2000	Winter 2000
The Real Neverending Story Discreet Monsters	Summer 2000	Summer 2000
Throne Of Darkness Sierra	Summer 2000	Winter 2000
UPDATE Tribes 2 Sierra	Summer 2000	Fall 2000
UPDATE Vampire: The Masquerade Activision	May 2000	Fall 2000
WarCraft III Blizzard	December 2000	Summer 2001
Warlords: Battlecry SSI	Spring 2000	Summer 2000
Werewolf ASC Games	Who Knows?	We Sure Don't

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STAR TREK VOYAGER ELITE FORCE™

SUMMER 2000

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RAVEN SOFTWARE

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Paramount

TEEN T Animated Violence

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Top 40

CGW's Monthly Readers' Poll

This Month	Last Month	Game/ Publisher	CGW Rating
1	1	**Half-Life** Havas Interactive	5
2	2	**StarCraft** Havas Interactive	5
3	3	**Age of Empires II: Age of Kings** Microsoft	5
4	4	**Unreal Tournament** Epic/GT	5
5	5	**Baldur's Gate** Interplay	4
6	6	**StarCraft: Brood War** Havas Interactive	5
7	7	**Homeworld** Havas Interactive	4.5
8	8	**Quake III Arena** Activision	3.5
9	9	**Rainbow Six: Rogue Spear** Red Storm	4.5
10	12	**Sid Meier's Alpha Centauri** Firaxis	5
11	13	**Heroes of Might & Magic III** 3DO	4.5
12	11	**Half-Life: Opposing Force** Havas Interactive	3.5
13	10	**Thief: The Dark Project** Eidos	4.5
14	14	**Planescape: Torment** Interplay	5
15	15	**Quake II** Activision	4.5
16	18	**Final Fantasy VII** Eidos	4.5
17	16	**Fallout 2** Interplay	4
18	17	**System Shock 2** Electronic Arts	4.5
19	20	**Command & Conquer: Tiberian Sun** Electronic Arts	4
20	24	**Rollercoaster Tycoon** Hasbro Interactive	4
21	21	**Grim Fandango** LucasArts	4.5
22	22	**SimCity 3000** Electronic Arts	4
23	19	**Baldur's Gate: Tales of the Sword Coast** Interplay	4
24	26	**MechWarrior 3** Hasbro	3
25	23	**Freespace 2** Interplay	4.5
NEW	26	– **Starsiege Tribes** Sierra	4
27	27	**Need for Speed 4: High Stakes** Electronic Arts	5
28	32	**Age of Empires: Rise of Rome** Microsoft	4
29	28	**Dungeon Keeper II** Electronic Arts	4.5
30	29	**Worms Armageddon** Hasbro	4
31	33	**EverQuest** Sony	4
32	40	**NHL 2000** Electronic Arts	3.5
33	34	**Heroes III: Armageddon's Blade** 3DO	4.5
34	39	**Total Annihilation: Core Contingency** Cavedog	4.5
35	30	**Jagged Alliance 2** TalonSoft	4.5
36	38	**Railroad Tycoon II** G.O.D.	4.5
37	36	**FIFA 2000** Electronic Arts	4.5
38	25	**Aliens vs. Predator** Fox	3
NEW	39	– **Might & Magic VII: Blood & Honor** 3DO	4.5
NEW	40	– **SWAT 3** Sierra Studios	4

From the more than 50,000 votes we received in the last few weeks, we can tell you take your favorites seriously. Especially the guy in Berlin who calls himself The Thunder King and votes every day for WORMS ARMAGEDDON. What is it with you, Herr King of Thunder? Lay off the WORMS and go visit a beer garden or something.

Top Action Games

1	1	**Half-Life** Havas Interactive	5
2	2	**Unreal Tournament** Epic/GT	5
3	3	**Quake III Arena** id/Activision	4.5
4	5	**Rainbow Six: Rogue Spear** Red Storm	4.5
NEW	5	– **Half-Life: Opposing Force** Havas Interactive	3

Top Adventure/RPG Games

1	1	**Baldur's Gate** Interplay	4.5
2	2	**Planescape: Torment** Interplay	5
3	5	**Final Fantasy VII** Eidos	4.5
4	3	**Fallout 2** Interplay	4
5	4	**System Shock 2** Electronic Arts	4.5

Top Simulations Games

1	2	**MechWarrior 3** Hasbro Interactive	3
2	1	**Freespace 2** Interplay	4.5
3	3	**Wing Commander: Prophecy Gold** Electronic Arts	4
4	4	**Falcon 4.0** Hasbro Interactive	3.5
5	5	**European Air War** Hasbro Interactive	4

Top Sports/Racing Games

1	1	**Need For Speed: High Stakes** Electronic Arts	5
2	3	**NHL 2000** EA Sports	3
3	2	**FIFA 2000** EA Sports	4.5
4	5	**NBA Live 2000** EA Sports	5
5	4	**Midtown Madness** Microsoft	4

Top Strategy/War Games

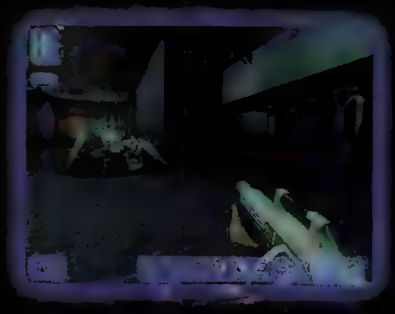
1	1	**StarCraft** Havas Interactive	5
2	2	**Age of Empires II: Age of Kings** Microsoft	5
3	3	**StarCraft: Brood War** Havas Interactive	5
4	4	**Homeworld** Havas Interactive	4.5
5	5	**Sid Meier's Alpha Centauri** Firaxis	5

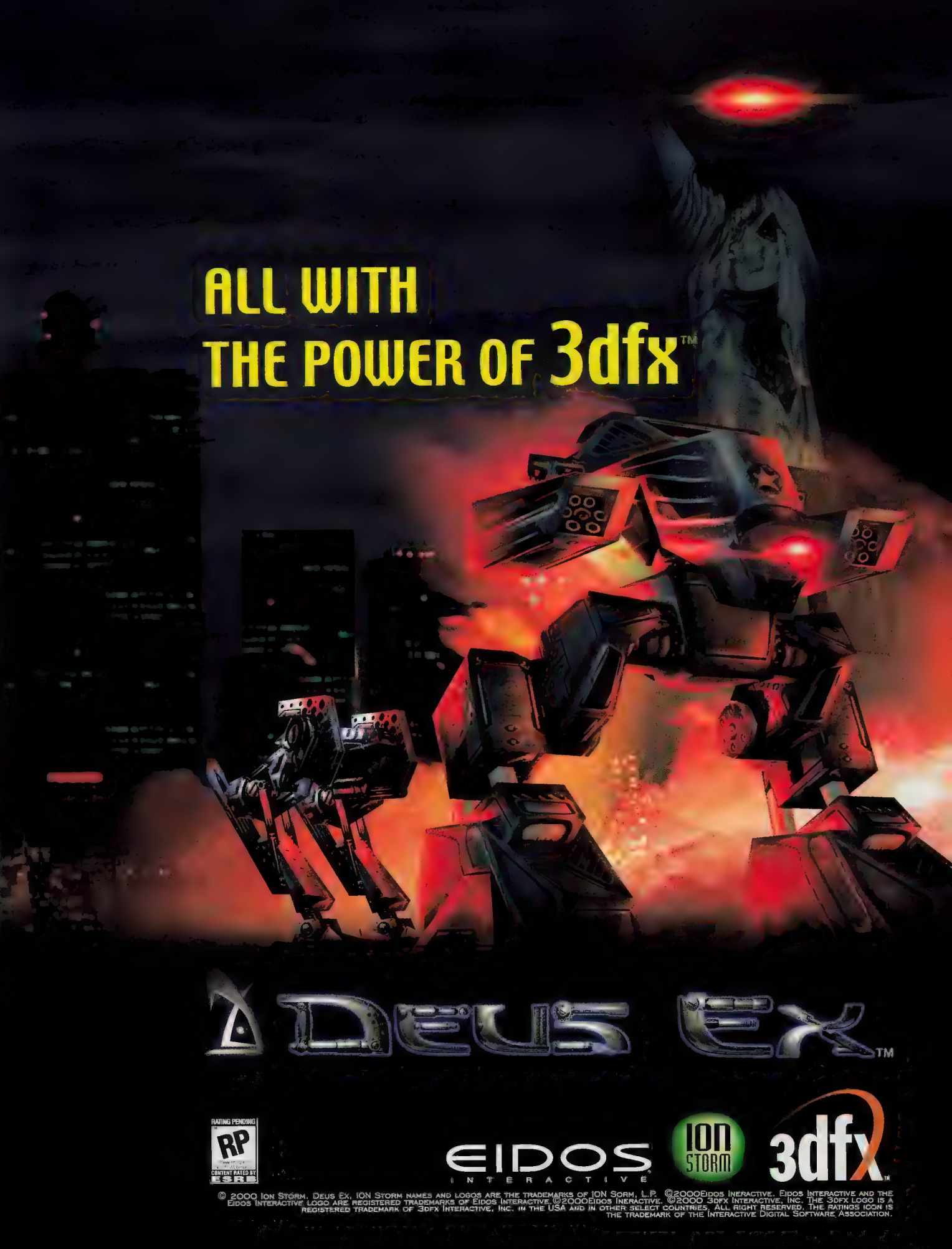
NEW POLLING PLACE!

Vote in the Top 40 Games poll at www.computergaming.com. The more people who vote, the better the results, but please vote only once per month. That means you, Thunder King.

IT'S YOU
VERSUS
THEM...

- TRAVEL THE GLOBE
- PROCEED WITH CAUTION
- QUESTION EVERYTHING





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MechWarrior 4

What Would You Like to Crush Today?

by Ken Brown

When Microsoft bought FASA and announced it would take over the MechWarrior line, we thought maybe Bill Gates was getting into the automotive business.

We had visions of Bill standing in front of the international press with an 80-foot-tall Shadowcat behind him, nasally intoning that "Microsoft products are not meant to be hostile to the competition," and joking that MechroSoft cars have smaller footprints than Windows 2000.

The point is, we didn't know what Microsoft would do with the venerable MechWarrior franchise. They'd be crazy to mess with 16 years of game history and a huge body of fiction, but we weren't sure how they'd try to broaden its appeal. The answer came when FASA legends Jordan Weisman and Dave McCoy jolted 150 members of the gaming press awake with a jaw-dropping demo of the game, already running in Microsoft's offices in March. The game has taken big leaps in graphic detail and pyrotechnic displays of firepower, but that's only part of the story. The developers want to put you into the middle of a dynamic story that unfolds during the missions, the outcome of which is up to you. They're creating more lifelike environments and putting more control into the player's hands. And they're reinforcing the sense of scale by letting you smash cars, down power lines, scatter pedestrians, and uproot trees. Says lead designer Dave McCoy, "We want you to have that experience of being Godzilla." (Redefining the term "Microsoft simulation.")

It was clear that MECHWARRIOR was stomping off in the right direction, but we had to find out more, just in case we're ever in Redmond and the earth starts shaking....

MechCommander 2

Getting Everything Right the Second Time Around

by Robert Coffey

It never made anything even close to sense. Here you are, dropping groups of ironclad, laser-blasting, missile-spitting, ambulatory skyscrapers of death on distant planets to wage their special brand of uber-scorched earth warfare, but for some reason—some absolutely incomprehensible logic-defying reason—the battlefield was shrouded in a maddening fog-of-war. Somehow, a civilization capable of sending towering war machines across space was incapable of launching a simple spy satellite to tell those war machines where they might run into, oh, let's say a barn, or maybe a nest of laser turrets.

Well, that was then, this is now, and the frustrations of the first MECHCOMMANDER are being systematically identified and squashed like so many fleeing Clan pilots under a Centurion's foot. MECHCOMMANDER 2 (MC2) looks set to deliver the goods the first game had promised. More than that, the game looks as if it could reach out beyond the hardcore BattleTech audience to reach strategy gamers of all stripes.

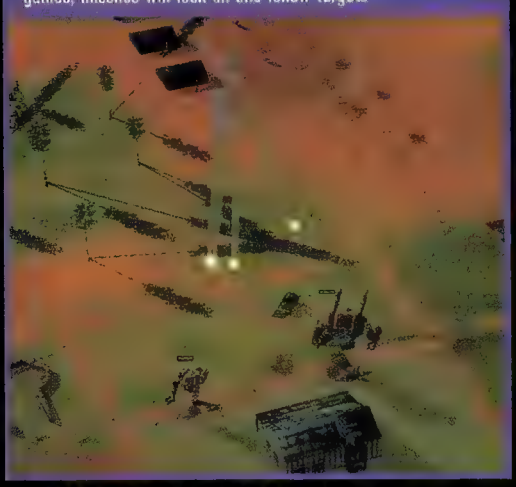
Power Steering

The primary focus of MECHCOMMANDER 2 is to be more accessible and to shoot players straight into tactical combat. To that end, that horrible fog-of-war has been eliminated. Instead, players will immediately be able to study the lay of the land and begin making strategic decisions based both on terrain and structural placement. Enemy units, however, will not be revealed until they hit your 'Mechs' scanner range, thus preserving the sense of danger. The biggest design challenge here is in crafting scenarios where a variety of approaches might work, and avoiding the puzzle-like quality of many of the first game's missions. The designers know this and will be spending

MISSILE COMMAND A new graphic engine features spectacular explosions, beautiful terrain, and more fluid 'Mech animation.

DEATH FROM ABOVE Among the many improvements in MC2 is the ability to call in air strikes whenever you need them, instead of paying for them pre-mission and hoping you'll use them. An extra added bonus: You get to see the bombers swoop in for the kill.

GUIDED MISSILES Just as in the MECHWARRIOR games, missiles will lock on and follow targets



It's All About You

Most science-fiction sims set up a story in the manual and try to advance it through mission briefings. Expect that to change in MECHWARRIOR 4, say the designers. In a series of story-based missions, the transition between engagements takes place in your cockpit or at your field base. The people you interact with in the game will provide tactical information about what's going on, and they'll present you with possibilities for advancement as part of the story. But you choose how to proceed, and the story will unfold based on the choices you make. "Using the characters and in-engine cinematics, we are able to present a narrative to you as you are living it," says lead designer JT Wagner.

You'll be able to pilot 21 different 'Mech types, including seven new ones that have never been seen. You'll still modify your machine with weapons and modules salvaged from your enemies. But the team is reducing the number of similar weapons to offer more variety, including new types like the Long Tom artillery piece. Most weapons will let you target individual areas

MECHWARRIOR 4
GENRE: Sci-Fi Simulation
RELEASE DATE: Q4 00
PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: Microsoft
CONTACT: www.microsoft.com

MECHCOMMANDER 2
GENRE: Strategy • RELEASE DATE: Q1 00
PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: Microsoft
CONTACT: www.microsoft.com

much of the year honing and refining the missions.

But Microsoft isn't throwing the 'Mech baby out with the bathwater; many of the things that *did* work in the first game are being retained. Your 'Mech pilots are still rated in three primary skills (gunnery, piloting, sensors) that increase with every successful mission, leading to special skills such as increased jump-jet range or more precise sensor readings. You'll still be able to custom-outfit your 'Mechs, but this time around there will be more options in the form of 15 new 'Mechs in the game (four of which are entirely new to the BattleTech universe).

WHERE GIANTS TREAD A couple of buildings already down, and plenty more to go – MC2 will feature lots of destructible objects to help drive home that whole "giant robot of death" thing.

Body Work

In fact, if you just look at the surface of the game, it's hard to see just how much is new. Rest assured, there's plenty. The most obvious change is the move to a fully-3D engine, fully incorporating every 3D buzzword you can think of. Even at this early stage, the game looks great, with detailed terrain and a slew of objects just begging to be blown up or trampled. The game figures to become even better-looking as the designers consult with the MECHWARRIOR 4 team, and coordinate not just the look of weapon effects but the design philosophy behind the game universe as a whole.

A new tutorial will acclimate players to the new waypoint system and other game mechanics, such as the option to call in air strikes or repair units at any time during the game. The ability to summon support at any time in a mission should be a huge improvement to the game, freeing gamers from having to decide whether to purchase support vehicles prior to a mission, with no idea as to whether or not they'll need it—just another user-friendly idea meant to embrace rather than alienate players.

PUFF DADDY Looks like a designer converted an LRM launcher into a bong.

NOT JUST PISSING IN THE WIND Elite units will be very effective at nailing you on the run.

GRAND OPENING Sometimes the graphics seem a bit overdone, but the artists are still working on how to depict all that firepower.

MechWarrior 4

on your enemies, and the team is working on tweaking the sniper-view to give you a greater range of control.

You'll also have more control over your lancemates than before. You'll choose pilots from a roster and match them up with their 'Mech and weapons, or let them decide. You can tell them to attack targets, defend others, form up, hold their fire, report their status, and repair—along with all the standard commands. They will protect you, follow you, and attack targets of opportunity using tactics suited to their abilities and their 'Mechs' abilities, all on their own. They're going to make Dominic Paine seem like a mule in comparison.

Expect the AI units to be much smarter than you're used to. They'll be able to employ a range of tactics, including rushing, jousting, sniping from a distance, and the terrifying "Circle of Death." They'll use their jump jets more intelligently, either to hover in place, jump over hills or canyons, dodge incoming missiles, or kick a hole in your cockpit with the ever-popular "Death From Above" maneuver. Elite units will move more intelligently, fire more accurately and more often, and evade incoming fire more stealthily.

AI units will have different personalities and morale settings, and can communicate intelligently with one another, says Microsoft's Paul Tozour. If you shoot a laser beam past an enemy 'Mech, he'll summon his squadmates for assistance. Expect enemy 'Mechs to become much less reckless as you shoot out each of their body parts.

Let's Head Out

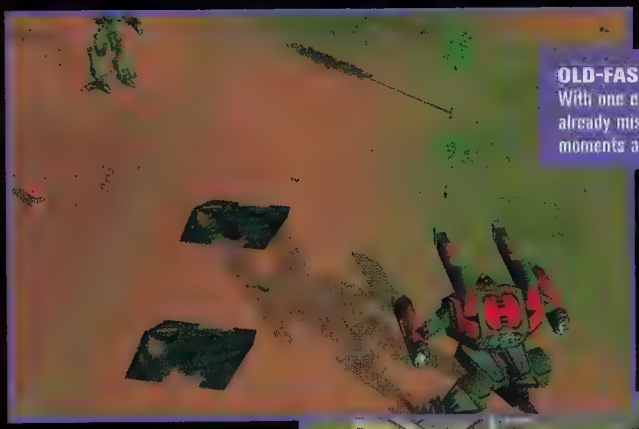
Instead of the desolate battlefields in MECHWARRIOR 3, the environments in MECH 4 will seem alive. Some levels will have hundreds of buildings and vehicles, including non-combatant units busily pursuing their own objectives. Enemy drop ships will streak in for an insertion until you blow them out of the sky. The action unfolds in day and night missions on a large variety of terrain in fog, rain, snow, blizzards, and lightning storms.

If you got tired of having to replay the missions over and over in MECH 3, you'll be happy to hear there will be in-mission save points. You won't be able to save just anywhere, but there will be two or three places in each mission where you can pause for the cause.

Multiplayer fans will have a host of new options to choose from. For the first time, players will be able to cre-

MechCommander 2

NIGHT WATCH The environments will be much more populated than before, and night missions will add new tension to the game.



OLD-FASHIONED GUNFIGHT With one enemy 'Mech down and another already missing an arm, this Blood Asp is moments away from winning the standoff.

KNOCKING ON HEAVEN'S DOOR Success in MC2 will hinge on more tactical approaches than this kamikaze Mad Cat is taking.

5 THINGS...

Ease-of-Use Improvements Over MECH 3

1) In-Mission Saves
Two or three save points each mission should cut down on the number of broken joysticks.

2) Torso Twist Gauge
A quick glance at your HUD will tell you which way you're facing.

3) Improved Interface
The designers are trying to reduce your dependence on the keyboard for combat control.

4) Dirty Tricks
Wanna screw with your enemy? Load up LRM carriers; park them behind a ridge; rain down hellfire. Repeat as needed.

5) Better Zooming
Instead of only one zoom, you'll be able to adjust zoom level using your mouse wheel.

While the first MC forced players to march through a strictly-linear series of missions, the sequel will be a little less rigid. The game's story—a struggle between three powerful noble houses of the Inner Sphere, with you as a mercenary commander hired by them all at some point—will be told through a sequence of 25 to 30 missions. However, at certain points in the game, you'll have the option to choose from among as many as three different missions. While it's true you'll have to complete them all in order to advance, the sequence you use can affect subsequent missions. For example, supplies you capture in one mission might prove vital to success in the next, or pilots you rescue could provide the manpower you need for a slam-dunk victory in a tougher scenario.

The developers of MECHCOMMANDER 2 are acutely aware of how special the BattleTech property is and are determined to get it right. By emphasizing accessibility and combat, they should reach exactly the audience they're shooting for—long-time 'Mech fans, and strategy gamers in general. CGW

AIR DROP Need support vehicles? No problem – just find a safe place and call in a VTOL.

5 THINGS...

Traits of a Kinder, Gentler MECHCOMMANDER

1) In-Mission Saves
Games can be quicksaved at any time, so you won't be forced to start every mission from scratch after making a bad tactical decision.

2) Difficulty Levels
Three levels of difficulty (added in MECHCOMMANDER GOLD) let gamers play games appropriate to their skills.

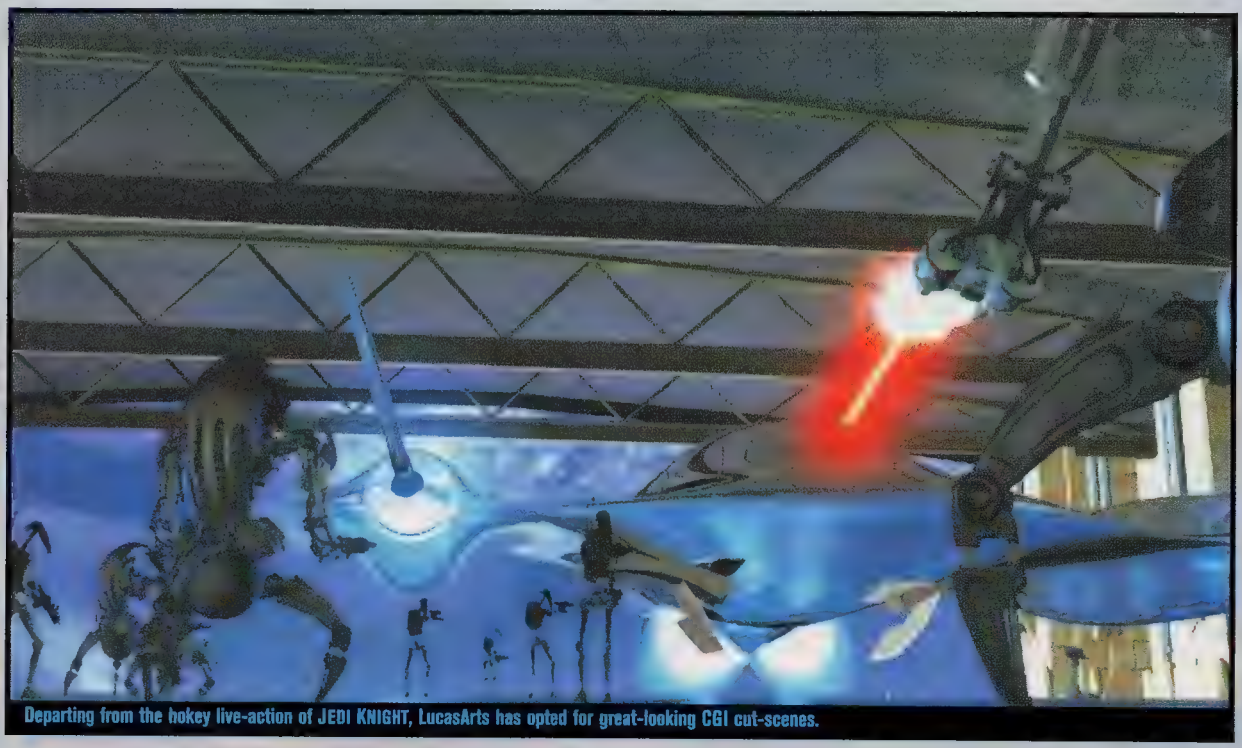
3) Improved Mission Interface
A step-by-step interface between missions will walk newbies through every step, so they won't inadvertently enter a mission with damaged 'Mechs. More experienced commanders will be able to save custom 'Mech configs.

4) Saving Money
Instead of blowing resources purchasing support vehicles prior to missions – without any idea as to whether you'll need them – you'll be able to purchase and fly in support units when the need arises, mid-mission.

5) Smart Missiles
As long as you have line-of-sight on a target, missiles will ignore obstacles and head for your target.

ate their own missions, host their own MechWarrior servers, and play cooperatively as a team. The developers must have spent some quality time with UNREAL TOURNAMENT, since they're planning on offering several multiplayer options like CTF, defend, assault, and convoy escort. Expect to play up to eight players over modem or 16 via broadband.

With so many promising improvements already underway, we're excited as to just how cool the game might become before its holiday release. It seems Microsoft has good insight into what it's like to be bigger than anything, able to go anywhere, and to obliterate all resistance. Now where'd they get that? CGW



Departing from the hokey live-action of JEDI KNIGHT, LucasArts has opted for great-looking CGI cut-scenes.

Star Wars Episode I: Obi-Wan

Fulfill your destiny, young Jedi.

by Thierry Nguyen

Kyle Katarn, hero or villain of the galaxy (depending on how you finished JEDI KNIGHT), has left the building. No, he doesn't die; heck, he probably isn't even born yet. Following the direction of the Dark Lord Lucas, rather than advancing into the future, LucasArts is reaching into the past. For this third title in the DARK FORCES series, you'll be playing future spiritual-advisor Obi-Wan Kenobi. After the post-1999-E3 yearlong silence, LucasArts allowed me to see STAR WARS EPISODE I: OBI-WAN just before this year's E3. While JEDI KNIGHT had a great sense of "Jedi flavor," OBI-WAN looks to go even further in simulating the path of the Jedi.

STAR WARS EPISODE I: OBI-WAN
GENRE: Action • RELEASE DATE: Q4 00
PUBLISHER: LucasArts
DEVELOPER: LucasArts

Since this is an *Episode I* game, I'll get the inevitable questions out of the way: Yes, you will fight Darth Maul. Yes, you can even *play* as Darth Maul during multiplayer, dual-saber and all. And no, I don't know what happens if you try to kill Jar-Jar. But we'll soon find out.

BIG CITY BLUES
With many of the locales taken from the movie, don't be surprised if some panoramas or backgrounds look awfully familiar.

Episodic Fits

Unlike THE PHANTOM MENACE game, OBI-WAN will not merely retell the movie. "We view *The Phantom Menace* [the movie] as a contextual framework for OBI-WAN," says OBI-WAN project leader Stephen Shaw. "We're focusing on Obi-Wan's unique experience this time. The game begins and ends the same way the movie did, but trust me, you won't rehash the movie."

Essentially, you'll be exploring all of Obi-Wan's off-screen time. For example, while Qui-Gon was meandering around Tatooine, Obi-Wan wasn't just playing with his lightsaber alone in the ship; turns out he had a side adventure involving Tusken Raiders (better known as "Sand People"). Remember when Queen Amidala proposed to sneak back into the Palace using an alternative, secret route? That route was illustrated in a nifty hologram, then followed immediately by a screen wipe, and voila—they're instantly at the Palace. You'll be playing the whole "sneaking" bit between the hologram and the wipe. There are plans for a total of 13 levels, most of which are as big as the largest lev-

HE DOES HIS OWN STUNTS With the focus on bodily movement, the team opted for motion-capturing a lot of OBI-WAN's slick Jedi stunts (and using the third-person camera). You can also play as a battle-droid and roll around to your heart's content in multiplayer.

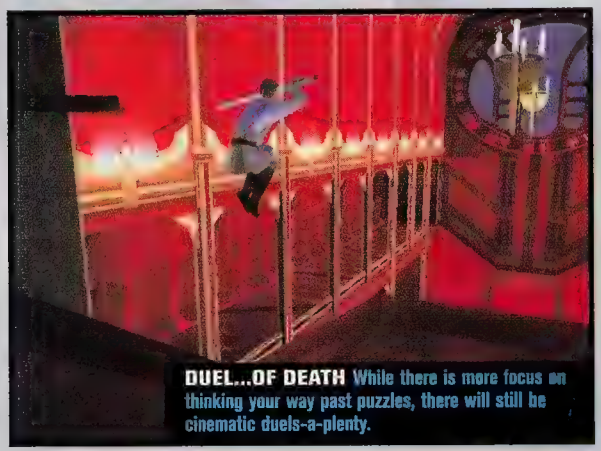
els in JEDI KNIGHT, says Shaw. Environments range from the familiar—Theed (the capital of Naboo) and Tatooine—to new locales, like the lair of the Tusken Raiders.

Solo Jedi

"We want to take the idea of being a Jedi even further than JEDI KNIGHT. When you're watching the movie, you don't see Qui-Gon or Obi-Wan bust out the BFG and blast away; you see them use their bodies and lightsabers," Shaw observes. That, to me, is the most interesting—and potentially controversial—design focus behind OBI-WAN.

Case in point: While there will be all sorts of blaster rifles and other nasty devices, your lightsaber is your best weapon, bar none. You're not Arnold, you're Obi-Wan. You'll be banking on your wits, body, lightsaber, and The Force. While The Force in JEDI KNIGHT translated into "extra weapons" (e.g., F1 to Heal, F8 for Lightning), this time, it's more an extension of your body. Just like using the "Run" key in other games, holding down the "Force" key will use the Force to modify/enhance your natural abilities; you'll jump higher, run faster, or push things from afar. Other powers under consideration include Heal, Deflect, Distract, and Throw Lightsaber. Even with this Force-and-body-centric combat, your mind will be exercised as well. Do you really want to fight all of those droids, or should you just sneak past them? "We lean more towards games like ONI or THIEF, where instead of blowing guys away with guns, you'll either use your head or your body," Shaw explains.

The Trade Federation's Battle Droids and their droid buddies will replace the ubiquitous Imperial Stormtroopers from past games as your primary foes.



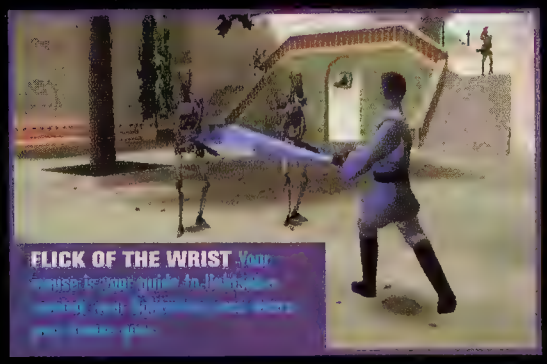
DUEL...OF DEATH While there is more focus on thinking your way past puzzles, there will still be cinematic duels-a-plenty.

Palm Saber

The biggest influence behind handling the lightsaber is...the Palm Pilot? Inspiration comes from many places.

Specifically, the lightsaber combat is focused on the "Glyphs" system found in Palm Pilots. That is, your hand motions on the instrument (for the Palm, it's that pen-like stylus; for OBI-WAN, it's the mouse) determine the results. JEDI KNIGHT had a series of different swings that popped out whenever you clicked the mouse. For OBI-WAN, you press the mouse, move it in the direction you want it to go, and release. The new combat system is more easily demonstrated than described, but imagine you're "dragging" your lightsaber around and you'll have the basic idea.

For old-school JEDI KNIGHT players, the old combat system is still there, but the OBI-WAN team hopes everyone learns to adapt to this one. Done right, the player can pull off some serious lightsaber moves with adroit mousing. The team also plans to let players customize their moves. If you don't like moving the mouse forward for an upward thrust, for example, you can change the control to move the mouse in another direction.



FLICK OF THE WRIST Your mouse is your guide to lightsaber swings and other Force moves.

Throw in some tanks, miscellaneous aliens like the Rodian (Greedo), Tusken Raiders, and swamp critters, and you have your rogue's gallery. What sounds coolest to me is that some of the enemies will be ones that were mocked-up for the film, but were ultimately cut in the editing room. One such enemy was a compact Battle Droid Transport, one of the best ways to explain "spawning enemies." They fly overhead randomly, and drop off five Battle Droids every so often to keep you on your toes.

Sensing Great Danger in the Future

While the focus on the Jedi experience sounds very solid, a lot of the gameplay is still up in the air. As of press time, the more technical aspects of the game were being worked on. The biggest milestone so far is the physics engine, which will dictate a lot of the puzzles during the game. Multiplayer is still in the concept stage; plans so far include a mix of traditional deathmatch with standard weapons (sniper rifles, grenades that explode into smaller grenades, stationary cannons), and teamplay-style missions (such as Escort the Princess, much like TEAM FORTRESS CLASSIC's "The Hunted"). Multiplayer will let you play as both humanoid characters and even droids, so you can womp around as Darth Maul or roll around as one of those pillbug droids.

Although I saw more technology than gameplay, the design team's ideas are intriguing. This looks to be not only a thinking-person's action game, but also a fully-fledged Jedi simulator in the same way RAINBOW SIX is an anti-terrorism sim. It's refreshing to know that this game won't be "QUAKE with Jawas," and I look forward to seeing more of it during and after E3. CGW

A Timely Upgrade to the Most Popular Online RPG | By Mark Asher

EverQuest: The Ruins of Kunark

DANCES WITH LIZARDS The new continent of Kunark will put you blade-to-blade with the Iskar, a race of evil lizard-men. Playing as the Iskar will give you innate swimming skills, infravision, and a natural resistance to fire. Verant's new animations make the game's characters seem much more lifelike than in the original game.

Hello, my name is Duin. I'm a druid and I like to turn myself into a wolf. Welcome to EverQuest Anonymous, where we're thrilled and horrified with THE RUINS OF KUNARK, Verant Interactive's upcoming expansion to EVERQUEST.

Whether you're the type of role-player who crosses his thees and dots his thous, or an action-adventurer who slaughters orcs at a pace that would make some folks think you're bucking for a promotion at the Oscar Meyer meat-processing plant, KUNARK should have something for you.

I Am the Lizard King

Verant is expanding on their wildly popular online game design by adding an entire new continent: Kunark, home of the evil Iskar.

At one time the Iskar, a race of lizard-men, dominated the world of Norrath, but they ran afoul of the godlike dragons and were all but wiped out in a war. Now, their civilization lives on as a pale (yet scaly) shadow of its former greatness. As you explore this new land, you'll discover remnants of their broken civilization in the form of dungeons and even stumble upon ancient battlefields littered with dragon bones.

EVERQUEST: THE RUINS OF KUNARK
GENRE: RPG • RELEASE DATE: Summer 2000
PUBLISHER: 989 Studios
DEVELOPER: Verant Interactive
CONTACT: www.verant.com

The KUNARK expansion allows you to play as the new lizard race. Iskar players can be one of the following classes: monk, warrior, necromancer, shaman, or shadow knight (a sort of anti-paladin).

The Iskar also have some unique abilities. Cabilias, their starting city, has a great deal of water in it, including many passageways that are underwater. As a result the Iskar have developed an innate swimming skill. And since the Iskar are as attractive as trolls, it's only fitting that they have the same regenerative powers as their fellow uglies. The lizards also have infravision—which is incredibly handy—and they get a small armor-class bonus due to their tough skin, with one drawback: They can't wear plate armor. Finally, the Iskar have a natural resistance to fire which is balanced by vulnerability to cold.

KUNARK will add 27 new zones for adventure, most of them larger than average. Add in the increased polygon count that the modified engine supports, and it's no surprise that the recommended system configuration is being bumped up from a P-166 to a P-266. Verant also is recommending 128MBs of RAM.

Watch It Wiggle

I've seen this expansion three times now. At E3 last year, I saw the new engine and thought, "That's nice." At GenCon I leaned a little closer and marveled at the new race of goblins with their tongues flopping around. However, I recently saw it again and finally became hooked. What got me? The new Iskar skeletons. It's not the higher polygon count so much as how the artists have been able to better animate the game world. Even when creatures stand still, they are animated in subtle ways, like the side of a rhino rippling while it breathes.

Speaking of creatures, KUNARK will feature over 20 new ones. The demi-liche is a whirling chaos of bones that coalesces into a humanoid shape just long enough to strike a blow. There's also a giant liche, as well as new giants. You'll battle scaled-wolves, sabertooth tigers, and wyverns. You'll run in fear from the new dragons and the sarnak, a race of dragon-men. And then there are the giant mosquitos, the burynai, a race of badger-men, and some odd living goo. Much like every school cafeteria, every game needs some hostile jello.

MIGHT AND MAGIC Expect more of the same bashing and magic-casting in KUNARK, and keep your eyes peeled for the Sarnak – a race of dragon-men.

All the character classes will be upgraded a bit as well, with some new spells and skills. KUNARK will raise the character-level limit from 50 to 60, but each level after 50 will be extremely difficult to obtain. As a bonus, each level increase after 50 will be rewarded with new abilities, and some new titles.

Verant is offering current players a chance to upgrade at a discount. Otherwise, you'll be able to find the expansion at retail, rolled into a new retail version of EVERQUEST. KUNARK is scheduled to be available by the time you read this. That's just enough time to warn your loved ones. CGW

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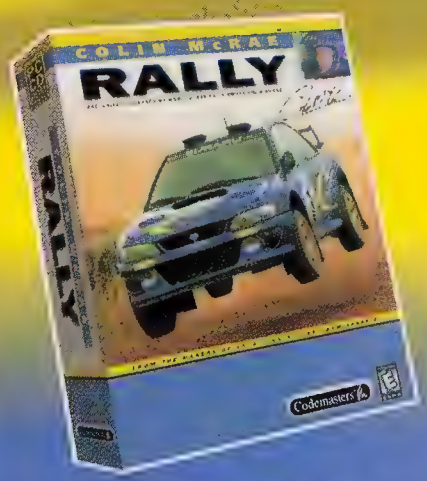

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VANGUARD hopes to dwarf players with the enormity of its scale.

Vanguard Takes Large-Scale Naval Battles Into Deep Space by Dave Salvator

U.F.S. Vanguard

As real-time strategy games look at a more squad-based approach, where you have fewer and ever more precious units at your command, Red Storm's upcoming title U.F.S. VANGUARD looks to dial the focus in even tighter. You're the captain of a capital ship, where you have minute control over a broad array of ship's operations as you do battle in the struggle between the Allied Forces Navy and the Hierarchy of Man. So rather than command a phalanx of disposable ships, your job is to go into battle and emerge victorious (or at least alive) with just one. And borrowing a page from the RPG Book of Game Design, your goal is also to have your crew survive intact, as they gain skills with experience.

U.F.S. VANGUARD
GENRE: Simulation • RELEASE DATE: Q3 2000
PUBLISHER: Red Storm Entertainment
CONTACT: www.redstorm.com

Our Story Begins...

You're cast as a captain in the mighty United Forces Navy, and your job is to protect the Allied territories from the destructive forces of The Hierarchy of Man, who seek to gain absolute control over the entire galaxy. Operating in enemy space, far from friendly support, you'll have to command your capital warship in fleet battles against other massive capital ships. The H.O.M.'s ships enjoy a technology advantage, whereas the U.F.N.'s fleet relies more on sheer numbers.

Though this backstory is fairly usual bill of fare, you will be able to explore VANGUARD's 40 star systems independently of your mission objectives. As you successfully complete missions, you'll be able to upgrade your current ship with better technologies, and will be given command of bigger, better armored ships that you take into subsequent missions.

When you deploy away teams, you'll have to choose the individual crewmembers best suited to accomplish the mission objectives. Of course, you may get interrupted mid-mission by unwelcome guests, forcing the decision of whether to leave your away-team on the planet surface to complete their mission and risk losing them, or to get them back aboard, take care of your unwanted visitor, and then resume the mission.

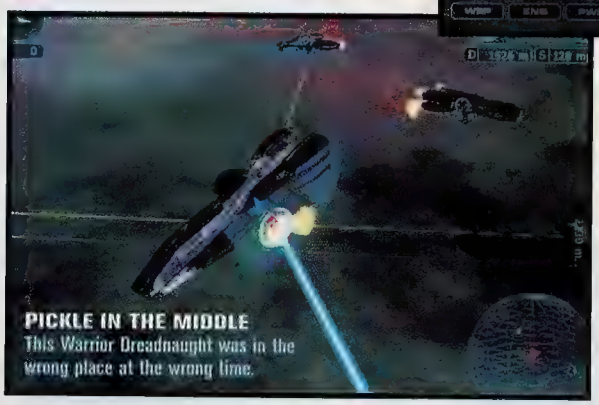
Micromanage, or Not...

As captain of your vessel, you'll have command of shields, engineering, weapons, electronic countermeasures (ECM), communications, and assigning crew members to away-teams for planet-surface missions. The VANGUARD design team is planning on allowing very detailed control of each station, but because this granularity could get you blown into space debris while you're trying to futz with these detailed controls, they're implementing what they refer to as "stances." You can pre-assign your weapons officers to concentrate fire on specific parts of enemy ships when you engage them in combat, so rather than having to manually assign these orders, you instead put the weapons officers into a given stance and they'll execute your orders accordingly. The same will be true for engineering and shields.

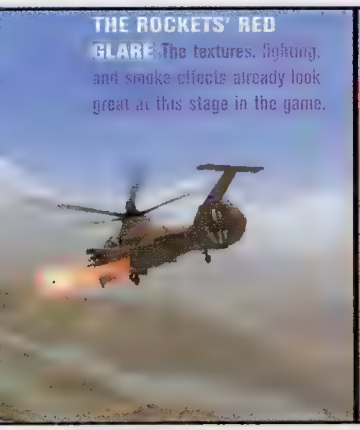
LIGHT 'EM UP Using the Advanced Targeting screen, you can define a stance wherein specific weapons get directed at particular sub-systems of your enemy ship.

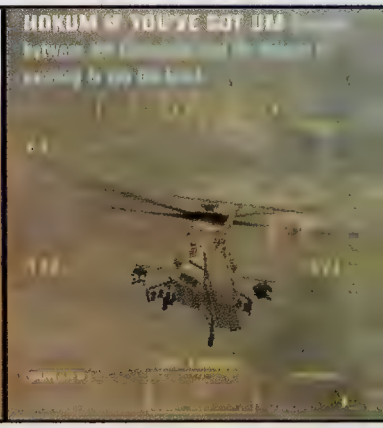
As your ship takes damage, you'll need to be thinking in terms of "triage," sending repair crews to restore the most vital systems first. At the heart of every ship in VANGUARD—irrespective of alliance—is the reactor core. Take it out, and a ship is dead in space, or gets blown to smithereens. But getting to the core will require getting past a ship's defenses, and individual ships will have different combinations of strengths for weapons, shields, and engines.

VANGUARD will also support eight-player multiplayer, either cooperative or deathmatch, and will be playable over LAN or the Internet. And for the do-it-yourself crowd, Red Storm is planning on shipping unsupported mission and ship editors with the game. Look for VANGUARD later this summer. CGW



PICKLE IN THE MIDDLE This Warrior Dreadnaught was in the wrong place at the wrong time.





Comanche vs. Hokum

COMANCHE Takes the Enemy Engaged Series to the Next Level

by Greg Fortune

COMANCHE VS. HOKUM is the sequel to APACHE VS. HAVOC from British developer Razorworks and Empire Interactive. If you liked APACHE VS. HAVOC, fasten your five-point harness, because COMANCHE VS. HOKUM looks to be on track to surpass its predecessor. Occupying the enormous niche that exists between the Novalogic and Jane's eggbeater sims, COMANCHE VS. HOKUM seems to be targeted for "Entertainment Simulation Enthusiasts." So, while you won't walk away knowing how to fly a chopper, you'll probably walk away with a big grin on your face.

Dynamic Dual

The beta we got from Empire has three of the seven theaters of operation, well, operational. Entering a theater, you'll be asked to join the side you wish to fight for. Then my favorite part happens, namely the generation of a dynamic campaign. How many sims have you flown where the entire campaign seems to revolve around how well your mission went? Now, ask any pilot who flew in the Gulf how realistic that is. The Enemy Engaged series offers us a better choice, namely the ability to take part in a battle where the conditions are always changing, day turns into night, and you can win the battle but still lose the war. During your missions, you'll even receive incoming radio traffic from units reporting victory or requesting assistance. Do you divert to help friendly units under fire, or continue toward your objective? Will not responding move the front lines in your enemy's favor? Do you have enough fuel and weapons (and helicopter) left to assist and still complete your own mission? These are the kinds of decisions I think real combat pilots face, and I really enjoyed having to make some of them myself, albeit from the safety of my home office.

COMANCHE VS. HOKUM
GENRE: Simulation • RELEASE DATE: Q2 2000
PUBLISHER: Empire Interactive • DEVELOPER: Razorworks
CONTACT: www.empire-us.com

COMANCHE HOKUM TOURNAMENT?
Razorworks has even modeled individual soldiers (and with all the vehicles, aircraft, and buildings

Weed-Whackin'

My favorite part of the game was, by far, the balance between the flight model and the terrain maps. Sure you can just cruise 700 feet above the ground on your way to your target, but you'll be SAM bait for sure. No—in a helicopter, what you want to do is fly the nape of the earth, or just a handful of feet above the terrain. Let me tell you, even screaming along under full military power, 50 feet above the treetops in 1024x768, the engine was absolutely smooth. In each theater there was an abundance of different terrain elements combined to provide you with piloting enjoyment. Whether you're flying along a river canyon, hugging the dunes in the desert, or sneaking along mountain passes, this game really gives you that "flying by the seat of your pants" feeling that should be part of any helicopter sim. In fact, the flight model was good enough that if the target was accessible by a land route, I wouldn't even use the autopilot, but preferred to remain in control of the bird so I could have some fun hugging the terrain.

I also enjoyed the visual effects immensely. The aircraft, ground units, terrain, weapons, and explosions all show off COMANCHE'S engine, which is an enhanced version of the original APACHE engine. In fact, I augured more of that one bird into the ground by spending too much time playing with all of the external and target views available. My favorite was probably the missile view, so I could watch the beautiful smoke trails and the glow from the rocket's exhaust, from the time it was launched until it turned an enemy tank into a scintillating fireball. Like I said, my preoccupation with the graphics sometimes caused my expensive air-combat vehicle to be used as an overpriced back-hoe.

COMANCHE VS. HOKUM is definitely one to watch, and if you enjoyed APACHE VS. HAVOC, keep this one on your radarscope. There's already a whole lot to like in COMANCHE, and if Razorworks' previous outing is any indication, this one's going to get even better. CGW

Real time strategy had no room for heroics.

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GameCraft

WarCraft II.
Diablo.
StarCraft.

Blizzard Entertainment's last three games are three of the best ever made. How do they do it? Can they do it again? CGW looks at Diablo II and WarCraft III to see if they still have the magic. Gee, do ya think?

DIABLO II

Welcome Back to Hell

IT'S MY PARTY Everyone in your party – including other humans, and any NPCs you've summoned or hired – will show up at the top-left of your screen, complete with current health-bar status.

Abandon All Hope (for Sleep), Ye Who Play DIABLO II

BY JEFF GREEN

The hour is almost upon us. You can feel it in the air. It is time to sharpen our swords, dust off those magic scrolls, and affix our toughest armor. The gates of Hell are opening again...*at last.* More than three years after rocking the gaming world with their award-winning, million-selling DIABLO, Blizzard is finally finishing up the sequel—and this time they mean it. No, really, they do.

On the eve of the battle.net beta test, Blizzard North invited three *CGW* editors to their office in San Mateo, California, to check out the latest build of DIABLO II. And it's true—the game is nearly complete. The developers' appearance told it all: tired, disheveled, but filled with the wide-eyed excitement and confidence that comes from seeing three years of labor finally paying off.

And after playing DIABLO II for 10 hours straight that day, we can tell you this: It *is* paying off. Within two minutes of booting it up, you will forget all about the last few years of "DIABLO clones" as Blizzard completely leapfrogs over its would-be competition. Don't believe us? More pre-release hype?

Stay awhile, and listen.

Bigger and Better

Actually, before spilling any more, we need a disclaimer. This is *not* a review. What we looked at was pre-beta test code. And although we played it all day long, we hardly made a dent in the game (yes, it's *way* bigger than DIABLO). Knowing Blizzard, the gameplay will be tweaked, items will be futzed with, and, many things will probably not work exactly the way we describe them when the game finally ships, because Blizzard will keep changing things up until the last minute.

But the basic feel of the game will not change, and that's what we want to describe here. Blizzard—feeling the pressure of living up to their own reputation and of trying to top their own game—has been working very hard on DIABLO II, and it shows. It's at once totally familiar and utterly new. It's got that same feel—the gothic atmosphere, the badass monsters and weapons, the crack-like hack-and-slash gameplay—and yet it plays totally differently than DIABLO. Like the first game, it's so bone-simple that anyone can sit down and start playing immediately, and yet it's so much deeper, with so many more subtleties, that it makes the original look like a warm-up act.

Let's start at the beginning.

Gone are the warrior, rogue, and sorcerer classes from DIABLO. No carrying over your character from the first game. The good news is that they've been replaced by five new classes, all far more complex than those in the original game: Barbarian, Paladin, Sorceress, Necromancer, and Amazon. Of the five, the Sorceress is perhaps the only real carryover from the first game, employing many of the previous fire, lightning, and cold spells.

Beyond this, though, you're in for a brand-new experience, with each class offering a different style of play. The Necromancer is largely (but not exclusively) a hands-off guy, a summoner of golems and skeletons who lets his minions do the dirty work, while he hangs back and soaks up experience. The Barbarian is the exact opposite, leaping into battle with a battery of war cries and a weapon in each hand. The Amazon is a master of missile weapons—bows, crossbows, and javelins—while the Paladin is a holy warrior, using magic auras to increase the offensive and defensive abilities of himself and anyone in his party.

TRUE COLORS Moving your cursor over characters reveals their name and hit-point bar. Names in white are standard monsters, blue names are champions, and gold names are unique monsters.

I Got Mad Skillz

The biggest complaint about DIABLO was that it was not "real" role-playing. Decision-making was minimal, and the difference between classes was not extreme. That has changed. Not only is each character class completely different from the others, but within each class there is a great deal of customization available; so that, for example, one necromancer might have completely different powers and abilities than another. Character evolution is going to require a great deal of planning and strategy—and everyone's going to have their own grand theories on what works best.

Every time you level up, you get five points to distribute among your attributes and a new skill point to apply. The skill point is the big deal here. Each character class has a Skill Tree with three distinct branches. Since skill points don't come cheap, you'll need to choose how to progress with care. You'll have to choose which branch or branches to pursue, and then how deep to take each skill. For example, as a necromancer, I was constantly forced to choose whether to increase a current skill like Raise Skeleton—which would let me summon more skeletons at one time to fight by my side—or to acquire a brand new skill instead, such as Bone Armor for better defense.

The great variance in classes

OG LEARN GOOD The tech tree for the Barbarian, showing the different ways he can learn to kill people.

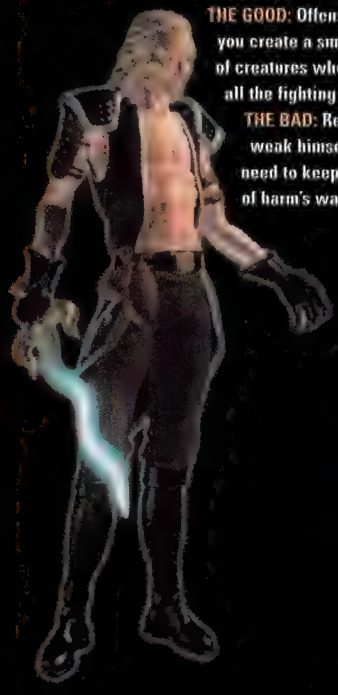
Necromancer

A dark sorceror who specializes in raising dead creatures and summoning golems.

SKILL TREE BRANCHES: Curses, Poison and Bone, Summoning

THE GOOD: Offense. Lets you create a small party of creatures who will do all the fighting for you.

THE BAD: Relatively weak himself. You'll need to keep him out of harm's way.



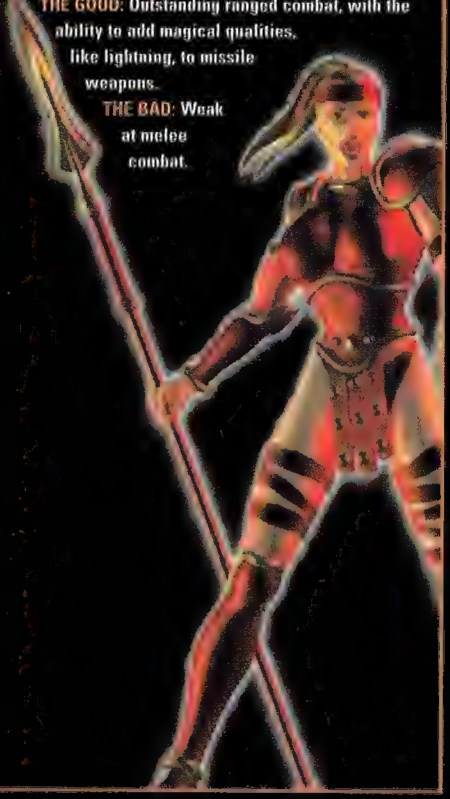
Amazon

A female warrior, somewhat like DIABLO's Rogue, but adept at both the bow and other throwing weapons, like javelins.

SKILL TREE BRANCHES: Bow and Crossbow, Passive and Magic, Javelin and Spear

THE GOOD: Outstanding ranged combat, with the ability to add magical qualities, like lightning, to missile weapons.

THE BAD: Weak at melee combat.



makes for much more compelling multiplayer games. In our game, we used a paladin to keep the party in a protective aura, the amazon to launch long-range attacks, and the necromancer to send in golems and skeletons for the kill. Experience points are shared, by the way (with a bonus going to the one with the killing blow), as is any money found, meaning that party members won't have to race around and beat each other to the fallen cash.

In addition to your own character, you will also be able to hire NPC mercenaries in each act who will join you and do battle with you until death, and who can heal, level up, and follow you from location to location.

Raising Hell

Whereas even a half-decent player could plow through DIABLO in about six to eight hours, DIABLO II is going to take most players at least five times as long to complete. The content stretches over four acts and four CDs, in multiple indoor and outdoor locations. We played through most of Act I straight through, and then skipped ahead to sample bits of Acts II and III before Blizzard finally booted us out. Each Act features a different town as a center for getting quests, healing, and buying and selling items, and each act is comprised of multiple quests leading up to an end Boss, which you'll have to beat in order to advance to the next part of the story. Once you "finish" one area, you can always come back to it later in the game—but disc-swapping in general should be minimal.

Because the game is coming out so soon, I want to keep plot spoilers to a minimum, but will tell the hardcore faithful that, yes, you will return to Tristram in Act I for the purpose of rescuing Deckard Cain—one of the Act's main quests. You'll encounter two other people from Tristram—Griswold and Wirt (well, part of Wirt, anyway)—but neither has come to a very happy place in life, as you'll see. Blizzard has done a much better job this time, actually, of putting a story into the game itself, rather than just in the manual. The world feels much more alive, and the gigantic backstory that Blizzard created in the first game gives them a lot to work with here; it's a lot deeper than you might expect. But, this *is* DIABLO—not PLANESCAPE TORMENT—and killing monsters is still the main activity.

Traveling Made Easy

If there's one thing that Blizzard is going to get grief for, it's the graphics. DIABLO II plays in one resolution only: 640X480

AURA GOODNESS The Paladin specializes in casting auras – both offensive and defensive – which affect all nearby party members, including any hirelings and summonable creatures.

COMING SOON TO ERAY Unique items are named in gold letters. This badass shield had the Blizzard guys themselves drooling with envy.

with 256 colors. Most of us have been spoiled by much higher resolutions these days, and this is perhaps the biggest casualty of the game's endless delays. That said, however, if you're not fussy about resolution, you are still going to find much to marvel at. Those with 3D acceleration will see spells rendered in 3D, and some, like the Blizzard spell, are awesome. Some of the game environments and architectural designs are fantastic, and unlike DIABLO, they're all over the map this time.

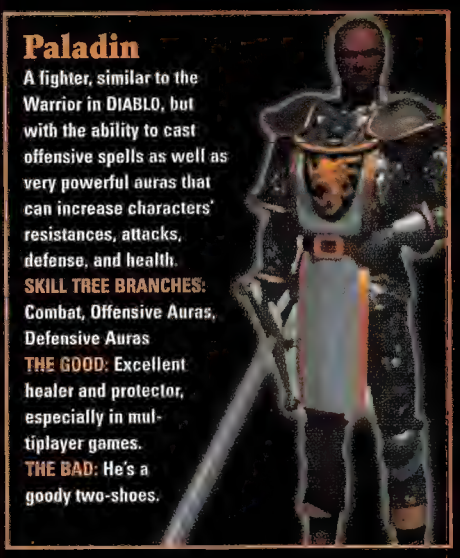
While DIABLO retained a largely static look—partially due to the game's small size—DIABLO II's environments vary from act to act, and within acts as well. An estimated 60 percent of the game takes place in outdoor settings, adding to the game's expansive feeling. The Rogue encampment, forests, and caves in Act I give way to a desert setting and a bizarre, Escher-esque "astral plane" in Act II. In Act III, you'll find yourself in a dark, wet jungle setting, complete with annoying little green pygmies firing blowguns, among other hazards.

Blizzard has made travel within the game extremely smooth. The best fix of all is the load times from one location to another—there aren't any. Go through a Town Portal, or enter a dungeon, and you'll arrive instantaneously. Moving from indoor to outdoor settings and back again does not remove you from the game itself. "Waypoints" also make travel much simpler; think of them as permanent, fixed town portals. You'll find one in every major location, and when you click on one, you'll be presented with a list of other waypoints you've visited that you can immediately warp to. The new, improved automap now has graphical representations of an area's major landmarks: waypoints, shrines, NPCs, Town Portals, as well as any party members in multiplayer games.

You can now run (thank goodness), though a new Stamina meter won't let you do it forever. Once the meter hits zero, you'll be forced to stop and rest. Picking up fallen loot is now much less of a chore. Pressing the Alt key will highlight all the items in the immediate area—weapons, gold, armor, potions—and you can add them to your inventory simply by clicking on the name. It's particularly useful for small items, like rings, that were often impossible to find in the first game. Any loot you don't feel like carrying around you can now store in a "private stash" box located in town—no more littering in DIABLO II. Exchanging items with other players is accomplished through a trade window now, rather than just dropping items on the ground.

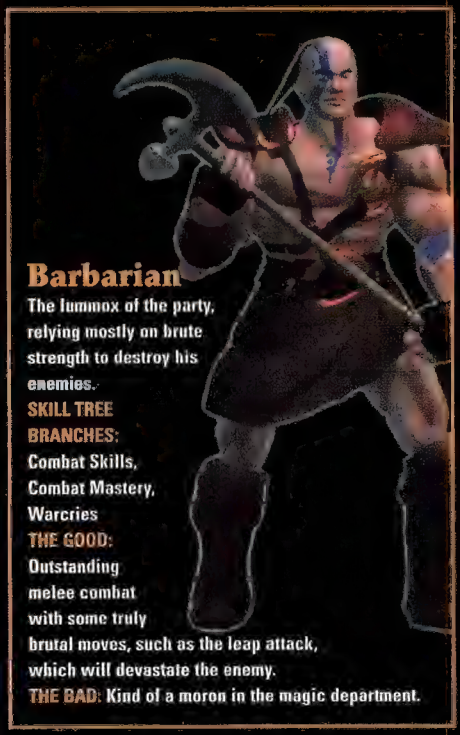
Toy Story

What made me the happiest during my marathon DIABLO II session was the sheer "goodie" factor. Blizzard has simply packed the game with things to do and try, while keeping the rewards coming at you. It's a fundamental design principle they understand well: Gamers like



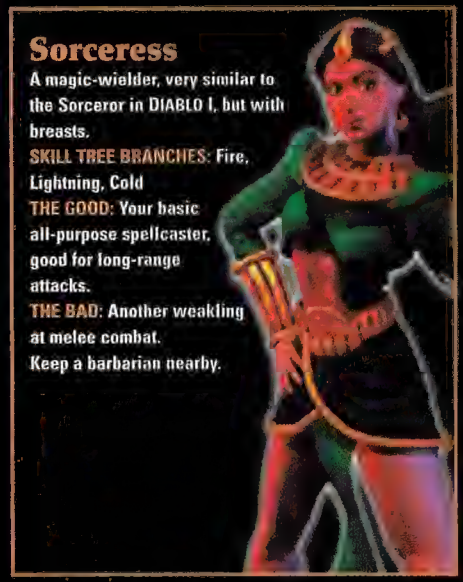
Paladin

A fighter, similar to the Warrior in DIABLO, but with the ability to cast offensive spells as well as very powerful auras that can increase characters' resistances, attacks, defense, and health.
SKILL TREE BRANCHES: Combat, Offensive Auras, Defensive Auras
THE GOOD: Excellent healer and protector, especially in multiplayer games.
THE BAD: He's a goody two-shoes.



Barbarian

The lummox of the party, relying mostly on brute strength to destroy his enemies.
SKILL TREE BRANCHES: Combat Skills, Combat Mastery, Warcries
THE GOOD: Outstanding melee combat with some truly brutal moves, such as the leap attack, which will devastate the enemy.
THE BAD: Kind of a moron in the magic department.

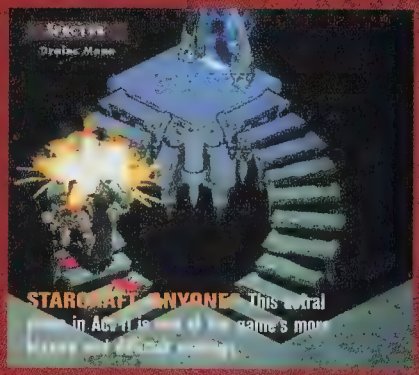


Sorceress

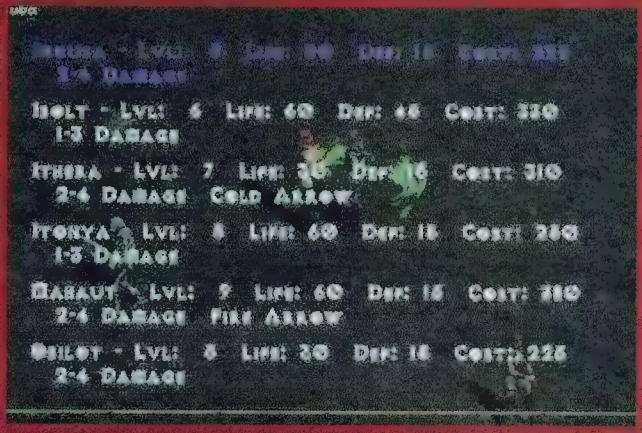
A magic-wielder, very similar to the Sorceror in DIABLO I, but with breasts.
SKILL TREE BRANCHES: Fire, Lightning, Cold
THE GOOD: Your basic all-purpose spellcaster, good for long-range attacks.
THE BAD: Another weakling at melee combat. Keep a barbarian nearby.

DIABLO II

DON'T POLLUTE You'll now have a private stash in each town location for storing items you don't currently need, leaving the landscape litter-free.



STARCRAFT ANYONE? This neutral in Act II is one of the game's more


HOLT - LVL: 6 LIFE: 60 DEF: 46 COST: 330
1-3 DAMAGE
ITHERA - LVL: 7 LIFE: 30 DEF: 16 COST: 310
2-4 DAMAGE COLD ARROW
ITONYA - LVL: 8 LIFE: 60 DEF: 18 COST: 260
1-3 DAMAGE
MAHAUT - LVL: 9 LIFE: 60 DEF: 15 COST: 310
2-4 DAMAGE FIRE ARROW
HILOT - LVL: 8 LIFE: 30 DEF: 16 COST: 225
2-4 DAMAGE

to play with toys. As a necromancer, for example, you create Iron Golems by sacrificing one of your metal items—and the golem will be imbued with whatever qualities that item had. Some weapons and armor now have "sockets" in them, and when you find gems and place them in the sockets, the item will take on different magical attributes.

Gamers will once again scour the game for unique, rare items, which almost certainly will wind up on eBay at some point. I found one particularly nasty bone shield—it created "open wounds" in opponents when used offensively—which had the Blizzard North staff itself drooling. One quest reward in Act I will have an NPC magically imbue any item of your choosing. Some NPCs in the towns will offer you the chance to "gamble" on a magical item. You pay a premium price, and won't find out what the item is until after you pay your money. Most importantly, the characters' Skill Trees themselves are simply one goodie after another—like the necromancer's Iron Golems. You'll want to replay the game constantly just to try out the tricks in every character's arsenal.

Hell Yes

Before closing, let's reiterate once more, with feeling: This is not a review. We'll have a more critical analysis when the game actually ships. But as we drove home late that night, after 10 straight hours playing DIABLO II, the overwhelming consensus was that the game had *more* than we were expecting. Sometimes, when a company takes as long as Blizzard has to release a game, you wonder, when you finally see it, what the heck the team was doing all that time. But Blizzard—with three Hall of Fame games in a row under their belt—appear to be intent on not blowing their reputation.

WARCRAFT II, DIABLO, STARCRAFT...and now DIABLO II. We'd sell our soul for those kind of odds. CGW

LEND ME MY EAR No more unceremoniously dropping items on the ground – there's a window for trading with other players now. Here, that bastard player/killer Bill Roper gives me back my ear.

The New Battle.net

The big news about battle.net is that Blizzard is moving to a client-server model. What this means is that when you play in a multiplayer game on battle.net, your character stays on the Blizzard servers at all times—whether you're logged on or not. This should prevent the cheating and hacking that so marred DIABLO I multiplayer games. (Note that this client-server model is *not* retroactive, so WARCRAFT II and DIABLO I games will still be peer-to-peer only.)

Blizzard is dividing battle.net into "realms," which is really just a group of servers. Right now, four realms are planned: U.S. west coast, U.S. east coast, Europe, and Asia. You'll be able to play with up to eight people in one game, and can set parameters beforehand, limiting games to players within a certain level range. Player killing *will* be possible, if gamers flag each other as "hostile"; but, as was demonstrated to us at Blizzard's office, players at similar levels will have a hard time actually doing it—especially since towns are neutral. Truly hardcore players will now be able to play in something called, appropriately enough, Hardcore mode, in which your character has one life only. When you die, you die, permanently.

The battle.net front end is changing to a more graphical look. When logged into a channel, everyone will be represented by a 3D model of their character, complete with the armor and weapons they're wearing (including any unique items), which adds a good touch of bragging rights to the community. Blizzard will also color-code names on battle.net based on what your difficulty level is, whether you've finished the game, and whether you're in Hardcore mode.

WARCRAFT III

Makeover Madness

STORM WATCH
Snow, rain, and other weather effects will play a part in the game, but not a frustrating one. Blizzard is adamant about avoiding the standard "unit slowing" effects of weather and is instead looking for new ways to make climate a factor, such as spells being more or less effective under certain weather conditions.

Just When You Thought You Knew Everything About WARCRAFT III, the Biggest Strategy Game of the New Millennium Undergoes Huge Changes.

BY ROBERT COFFEY

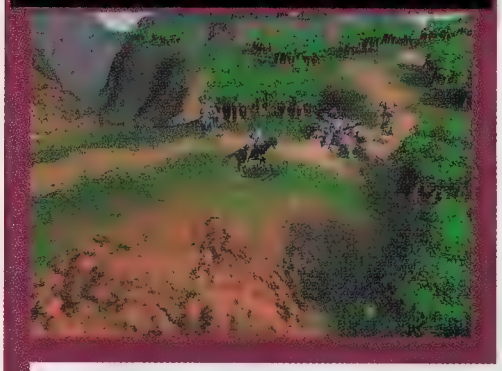
Sam Raimi began making mainstream movies. Harvey Keitel holstered his guns and psychopathy to play sympathetic characters. Dylan went electric, Dylan found Jesus, Dylan lost Jesus and found Roy Orbison, Tom Petty, George Harrison, and that freaky guy from E.L.O. And now WARCRAFT III, the most anticipated strategy game since Blizzard's own STARCRAFT, is undergoing some fairly significant changes, and we—the benevolent, puppy-hugging, cookie-baking souls that are *CGW*—are here to fill you in on the game's new direction.

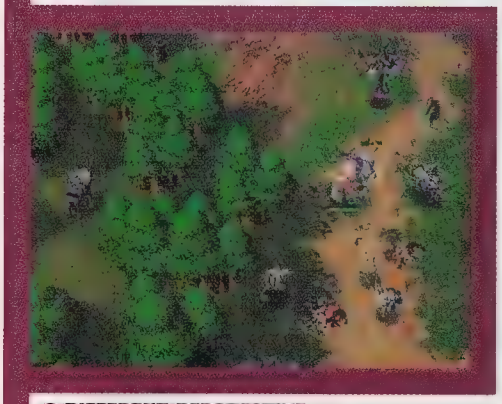
Forget everything you've read so far. *This* is what WARCRAFT III is going to be.

Hero Worship

Some elements of the initial WARCRAFT III vision remain unchanged. The focus is still on tactically-oriented up-close-and-personal combat, with super-unit heroes functioning as the beating heart of the game. Heroes function much like avatars in RPGs, gaining experience and abilities as they successfully win battles or complete quests. As heroes develop, they confer bonuses—such as increased attack abilities—to the units under their command. Taking another cue from RPGs, the game will unfold in a continuous 3D world without jarring mission-

WARCRAFT III





A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE These shots illustrate some of the changes brought about by the new camera position. While the first shot shows how the initial camera angle really drew you into the action, the second shot shows how the new isometric angle gives you a better view of the overall battlefield. The only design drawback was that the character art had to be resized in order to keep it looking good.

briefing screens; instead, missions and quests will be revealed by characters and situations.

While it's a fully-3D world with gorgeous terrain and weather effects, don't expect the game to mirror what we've come to think of 3D tactical-strategy games, i.e. MYTH. WARCRAFT III will provide bonuses for exploiting elevation and the like in combat, but it's nowhere near as military in its battle approach. Instead of a traditional RTS where you churn out hordes of expendable units to throw at your enemies, the goal here is to encourage players to basically micro-manage their battles, hurling spells and counterspells, special attacks, and unique defenses against each other. To further encourage hero use, slain heroes can be resurrected back in town for a steep price.

In some ways, the approach is a direct response to the way gamers played Blizzard's previous hit, STARCRAFT: not using superunits for fear of losing them, and not using the special abilities of their regular units in order to scramble up the tech tree and grind out more units. In order to encourage a playstyle not focused on campaigns of attrition, Blizzard experimented during WARCRAFT III's early design phase by playing special STARCRAFT maps with only one resource, and with units three times as tough and three times as expensive. With every unit triply precious, players were forced to take the time to cast Infestation and the like in order to win.

CHECK AND MATE With the game focusing on much smaller, more intense battles than a standard RTS, WARCRAFT III will force players to adjust to their opponents' every move. Every spell, like this lightning attack, will have some sort of counterspell.

As a direct result of that, all the action in WARCRAFT III will be shaved down to about a quarter of a traditional RTS. Battles will pit concentrated squads of about ten to a dozen units against each other. All of these elements are part of the original design, but that design has undergone significant changes.

Cutting Loose

The biggest change in the game has to be the addition of a free-scrolling camera. Previously, the camera was attached to whatever hero was currently active. While this approach was a fantastic way to get gamers knee-deep into the conflict, it produced some substantial limitations. For one thing, the game played much more like an RPG, with a band of adventurers wandering around a sprawling world. Camera control also became an issue: By locking the camera only to heroes, gamers would be forever spinning the camera in order to move their hero and would constantly have to reorient themselves when jumping from hero to hero.

By releasing the camera from the hero, Blizzard

Heart and Seoul: the Korean STARCRAFT Craze

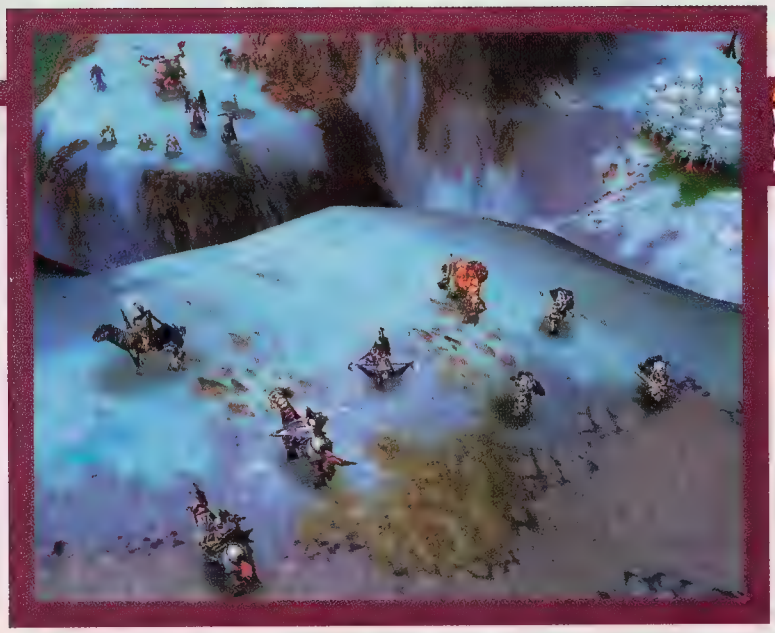
Don't mess with Korea. North America's top STARCRAFT player did, and he got spanked so hard in a South Korean tournament that he didn't even place. If he had known what he was getting into, he might never have gone. Judging by the sales numbers, one in every 45 men, women, and children in South Korea owns a legal copy of STARCRAFT. And they're not just playing at home. They've honed their multiplayer skills in a profusion of cyber cafes that have sprung up throughout the country. In the last two years, the number of game rooms (for surfing the Net or playing networked games) has grown from 500 to 15,000, and the national press says it's all because of one thing: STARCRAFT. What the hell is going on over there? Who's spiking the kimchee?

Paul Sams, senior VP of business development for Blizzard, says it isn't Blizzard's fault. They never even changed the language in the game to Korean; the only Korean words are on the box and in the manual. After selling 188,000 copies of STARCRAFT in Korea in 1998, Blizzard thought the game did pretty well for a relatively-small Asian country, and figured it would taper off. But last year, STARCRAFT sold over 980,000 units in Korea, dwarfing all other PC games there. The next-best selling title in Korea, FIFA 1999, barely sold over 100,000 units. "It crushed the shit out of everybody," says Sams.

STARCRAFT not only outsold every PC game in Korea, it outsold the top-selling game in the U.S. by a wide margin. That's right, a population one-fifth our size bought nearly 300,000 more copies of STARCRAFT than Americans purchased our top-seller, ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON. And, according to Sams, it's still selling 40,000-50,000 copies each month (roughly comparable to Windows 98 in the U.S.).

Is this part of a wider Asian phenomenon? Are Koreans competing with Taiwan and Japan in some kind of international gaming showdown, with each nationality assuming a different race? Nope. Blizzard says sales in other Asian countries are okay, but something in the water in Korea is making them snarf up STARCRAFT like Pokémon cards. The parallels with Pokémon also extend to merchandise, including STARCRAFT hats, t-shirts, stickers, snack chips, and autographed copies of the game. A soundtrack has just been released with some of the top Korean groups performing songs to the key of STARCRAFT. The distributor expects to sell at least one-hundred-thousand copies.

But the most unusual display of STARCRAFT fever came last year, when combined sales for STARCRAFT and BROOD WAR broke the mil-



A MAP OF THE WORLD It may be Blizzard's first 3D engine, but WARCRAFT III sure doesn't look like the designers are having trouble figuring out how to use it. Just check out the terrain and texture detail – this is going to be one sharp-looking game.

has opened up the gameplay to allow players to move units independently of heroes. While the advantages gained by being in proximity to a hero will encourage gamers to keep their dwarven riflemen and troll hunters near their leaders, they will no longer be forced to play the game just one way. The ability to move the camera around the entire gameworld will also let players build their town in a much more free-form way, and allow the construction of defensive structures anywhere on the map. This will also allow Blizzard to include more buildings in the tech tree, expanding on the town-management aspects of RTS play that the designers felt were being shortchanged in the initial design.

Freed from the tyranny of the locked-in camera, WARCRAFT III will now definitely include peon units to mine gold. Gold should be the only resource in the game, and your peons will have to mine it, but there should be some alternative sources for the shiny stuff including docks and the like. Blizzard is even toying with having slain NPCs pop-off gold when they expire. And while lumber is not likely to be a resource, peons will be able to chop through tree lines and open up new parts of the map. The interactive terrain will also benefit from the freed camera, letting gamers exploit line of sight and terrain advantages by perhaps putting ranged units on an overlooking cliff, while the hero-led main force invades an enemy camp.

If there's a downside to the new camera, it's that all the art has to be resized. Characters that looked great from an over-the-shoulder view may not look so sharp from a more isometric view, and the impressive scale of the buildings will have to be pared down. Even with these graphic changes, the game still looks stunning, especially the animations and spell effects. Earthquake spells unleash rippling mounds of earth, while defeated undead dissipate into a cloud of screeching bats or are pulled into the ground by cruel spectral arms.

Party of Five

Other big changes include the axing of an entire race from the game. Initially, WARCRAFT III was to spin an epic yarn from the vantage point of six unique races. But after trying to shoehorn that sixth race in, the designers realized they were trying to pound a square peg into a round hole—maybe it just didn't belong. To that end, the game will have just five playable races: humans, orcs, the undead, demons, and an as-yet unannounced race. Contrary to speculation, that final race shouldn't be elves, since an elven priest and elven sorceress will be part of the human-unit set.

Blizzard has also confirmed that special magic items, *a la* the HEROES OF MIGHT & MAGIC series, will be sprinkled throughout the gameworld. The reason for this is twofold: The special abilities gained from the items will allow for even greater hero customization, and will also permit the designers to directly address potential game imbalances.

All of these changes are geared to emphasize strategic facets of gameplay that might have been getting lost amid the new RPG elements. More importantly, these changes are a direct result of trying to make the game more *fun*–and isn't that all that matters? CGW

lion-units mark. The game's distributors were so elated at the prospect of grossing over $20,000,000 on the games, they decided to throw a big bash. So they rented the Olympic weight-lifting arena and hired three popular music groups to perform. The highlight of the show was definitely the staged production of elaborately costumed Zergs, Protoss, and Terrans acting out fantasy battles before an audience of thousands of hysterical STARCRAFT fans. It's probably the first time a theatrical production has been based on a computer game.

Blizzard's Sams couldn't believe his eyes. "I sat there dumbfounded. They had people running around as Zerg Hydralisks with their arms waving and doing these staged attacks against the Humans. I just stood there in amazement at how crazy these people were." *–Ken Brown*

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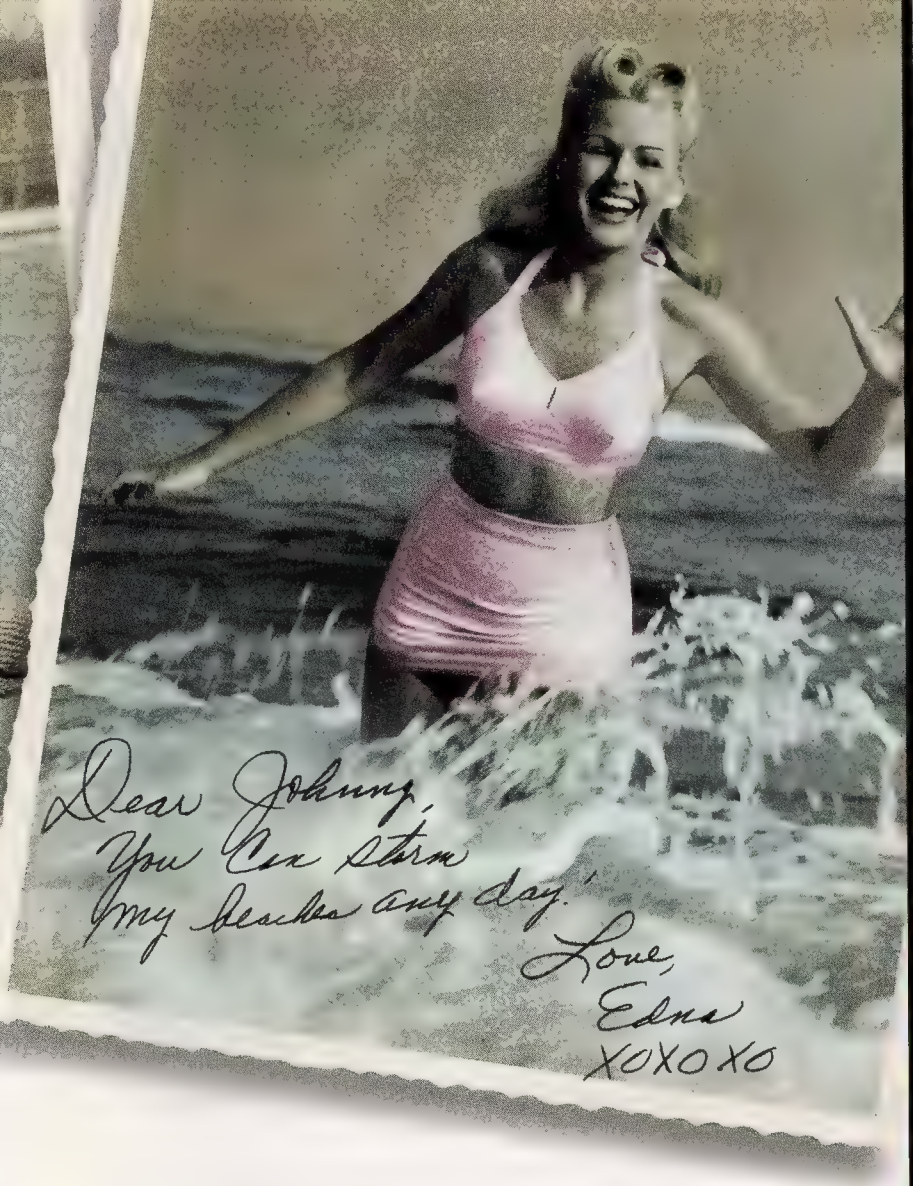
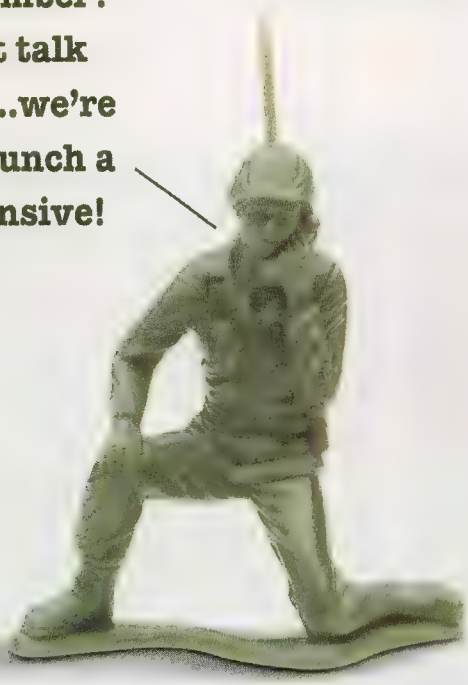


Edna? How'd you get this number? No! I can't talk right now...we're about to launch a major offensive!



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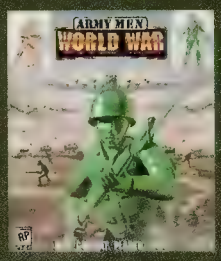

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I Pulled 9Gs and Survived

CGW's Jesse Hiatt Gets Some Stick-Time in a Real F-16

What if you really could fly the machine of your dreams? The one you could swear you were flying, only to wake up in a cold sweat, realizing it was just an REM-based flight of the imagination?

By Jesse Hiatt

Well, for this very lucky S.O.B., the dream came true. The plane? The F-16. The place? Nellis Air Force Base, outside Las Vegas. The experience? Beyond my wildest dreams.

The Air Force periodically offers what are politely termed "incentive rides," where they take up a celebrity or even a journalist hack like myself to promote just how cool flying fighters is. After a fair amount of red tape and conniving, the whole thing was miraculously approved. I was going up with Major Ken "#8" Edwards of the USAF's Thunderbirds.

A few weeks later, I arrived at Nellis very early in the morning with little sleep, and even less food, leaving lots of room for gigantic butterflies to go barnstorming through my belly.

CANYON CARVING The low-level maneuvers we did through the canyons of Death Valley shared the sky between mountain outcroppings and sheer cliffs.

I THINK I JUST FILLED MY FLIGHT-SUIT Here I'm getting sweat box as we complete an inverted

Pre-Flight Check

To get myself ready, I studied every inch of Microprose's FALCON 4 so I could know as much going into the flight as possible about the F-16's avionics, speeds, feeds, and handling characteristics—as much as any computer game could prepare me, that is. FALCON models the cockpit systems of the F-16 more accurately than any other sim, and I had been doing my homework. I had also researched the maneuvers in the Thundebirds add-on for Jane's USAF, but it was thanks to the intense study of FALCON 4 that I could identify nearly every switch, knob, and button in the cockpit. The HUD display and radar pages were all, almost to the pixel, the same as in the game. But when I went from comfy desktop gaming rig to inverted at 450 knots, I gained an entirely new perspective on the challenge of flying one of these beasts.

The F-16 has always been my favorite fighter jet and just standing next to one of those beauties was a thrill. After a whole morning's worth of briefings, but before I could even absorb it all, the crew chiefs were connecting me like a cyborg to the backseat of the real deal: the F-16D. You don't so much get into an F-16 as strap it on. Your interface with the bird includes an oxygen mask, connector, and two hoses; one G-suit hose; one wire for the mic and speakers in the helmet; four clips onto your harness from the parachute and survival gear; and one lap belt. As I adjusted the shiny red flight helmet, and tightened the oxygen mask, the canopy came down and we started to roll. This was the realization of a lifelong dream, and I was determined to relax and relish every second of it. All the nervousness and tension went away as soon as we taxied out, and I felt strangely calm and relaxed.

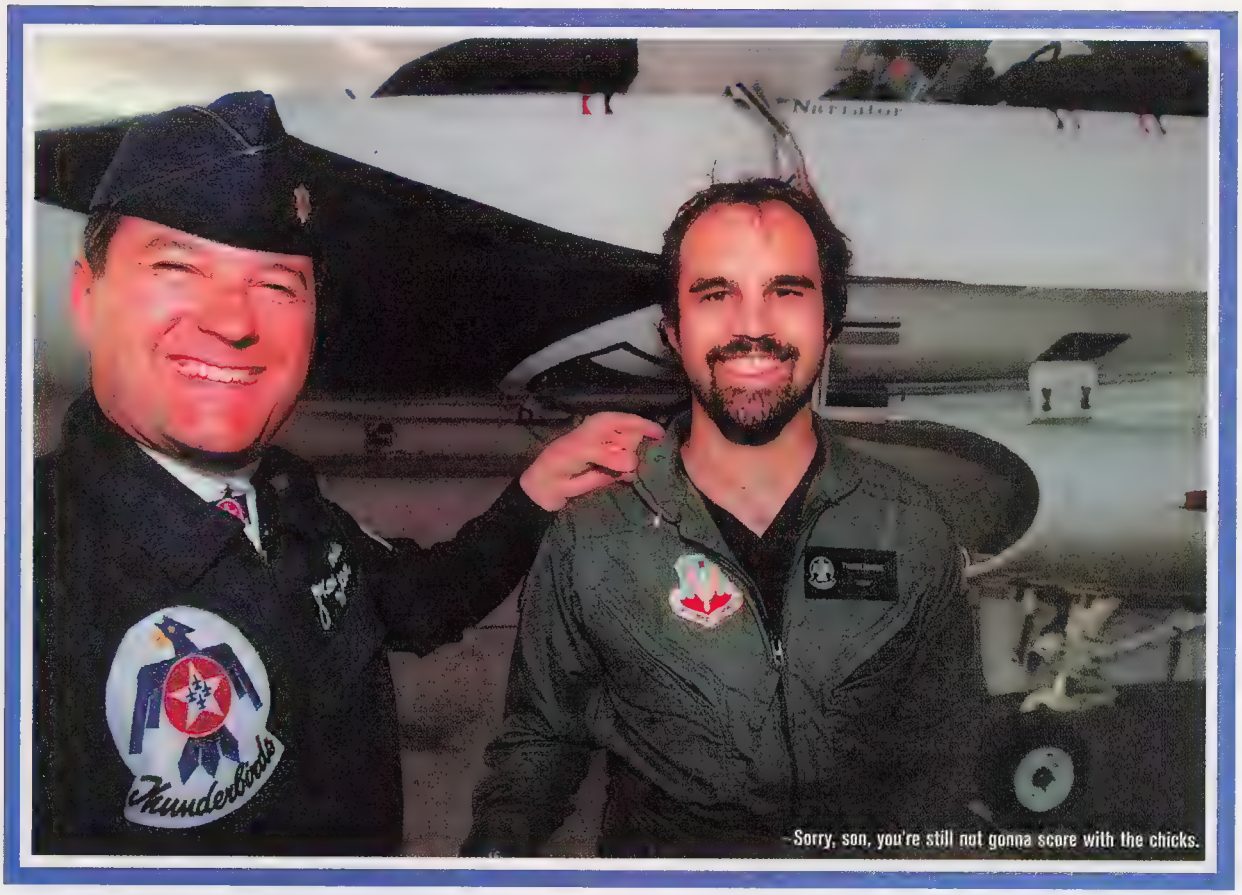
Cleared for Take-Off

No game could ever have prepared me for the visceral reality of flying a real F-16. The take-off was absolutely mind-blowing. We lifted off, sucked up the gear, and pulled 5.8 Gs up to 90 degrees, climbing straight up to 16,000 ft. in 10 seconds! There was a layer of clouds at 15,500 and Ken picked a hole, went straight up through it like a rocket, and just like that we were upside down above the clouds, looking down. To give you some perspective, the little Cessna 152 I train in would take at least 30 minutes to reach its 12,000-ft ceiling.

To be sitting on the ground one second and then up above the clouds in the blink of an eye is an awesome

For one brief moment, seeing his name on the canopy, he thought he really was a Thunderbird.

ON FINAL On the left is a final approach in FALCON 4.0... ...and on the right, the real deal.



—Sorry, son, you're still not gonna score with the chicks.

experience to say the least, but it's also a little disconcerting. I was strapped into the cockpit so many different ways, and the visibility in an F-16 with its expansive bubble canopy is so good—even in the back seat—that it was very easy to forget that the plane was there at all. It felt as if I were sitting in a little chair in the middle of the sky! It is really an amazing experience, and is very hard to describe. I now realize that a pilot is not unloading an empty cliché when he says that he "becomes one with the plane."

Show Time

Although the plane behaved as expected (like a dream), the controls were not at all what I was used to and required a whole different technique. The F-16 has a fly-by-wire system, and the stick has almost no travel at all, maybe an eighth of an inch. It is pressure sensitive and requires a very light touch; the more force you exert on it, the greater the effect. It goes beyond hand-eye coordination because you don't even move your hand at all, you just tense your muscles and the plane responds. The next logical step would be to hardwire it to the pilot's brain—and I'm sure they're working on that right now.

To say that it is easy to control is not to imply that it is easy to fly. Even a shallow turn is a dramatic physical experience; anything you do, although it can still be very smooth, definitely gives you that intense roller-coaster feeling. I got to fly for about 20 minutes total, and after getting a feel for the plane, I got to try some rolls, a loop, a split-S, and various high-performance turns. For never having performed aerobatics before in my life, I think I did pretty well; but when the real Thunderbird—Major Ken Edwards—got his turn, school was in session.

We went down, as he put it, "in and amongst the little rocks" for a simulated low-level bombing run that has permanently raised the bar for excitement in my life. After a Star Wars-style trench run through desert hills, Ken picked some poor dirt farmer in Death Valley for a target, and he should thank his lucky hoe they don't put bombs on the Thunderbird's jets.

After that inspirational adventure, a vertical corkscrew got us up out from 500-ft back into the clouds in about five seconds, and the grand finale was a pummeling 9.2G turn.

Gravity's a Bitch

I used to think blackouts were baloney, but then I found out what it was like to weigh 1380 pounds. The G suit started squeezing my legs, my head got pinned to the back of the seat, and as the turn continued I completely lost my vision and only barely held on to consciousness.

The only thing similar to it is the overpowering sensation of a huge wave breaking on top of you and drilling you into the sand. I will forever have respect for the pilots who can withstand that kind of treatment—maintaining situational awareness, control over the airplane, and good communication—all the while fighting for consciousness along with their lives. It is not easy...just ask John McCain. He crashed four times.

I'm just proud that I made it through without puking. Of course, the flight was spectacular, a once-in-a-lifetime experience, a dream come true. Just to meet the men and women of the Air Force's elite squadron was a great honor.

But it was also a very heavy, sobering experience. I got a glimpse of the true power of one of humankind's most sophisticated weapon platforms, and it was awesome in the ancient sense of the word. Only a hundred years ago, an F-16 would have been looked upon as a god, coming without warning and bringing fire and brimstone from the heavens. But in an era of cruise missiles and stealth fighters, they just use them to haul two-bit journalists around for good P.R. CGW

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HALL OF FAME
INDUCTIONS

Welcome to the Cooperstown of Computer Games

Fallout

StarCraft

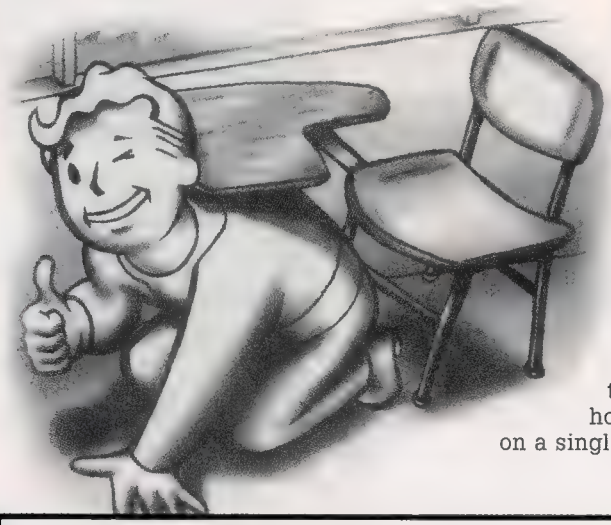
Dani Bunten Berry

Inside these hallowed halls you'll find the finest games, and the finest game personalities, that interactive entertainment has produced during its first 25 years. This month, we induct FALLOUT and STARCRAFT, two of the most beloved and influential games in recent memory. In addition, we induct our second humanoid into the Hall, multiplayer gaming's patron saint, Dani Bunten Berry.

Fallout

Interplay, 1997

No one saw it coming. When Interplay released FALLOUT in 1997, expectations were not high. Not only were hardcore RPGs in a deep slump, but FALLOUT itself had suffered through a long, difficult development. It was originally to be based on Steve Jackson's GURPS pen-and-paper system, but "artistic differences" caused Jackson and Interplay to part ways—and pundits like us predicted doom. We couldn't have been more wrong.



Brilliantly conceived and executed by Tim Cain, Leonard Boyarsky, Jason Anderson, and the rest of the team, FALLOUT was a minor miracle, and easily one of the best games of the 90's. Set in a nightmarish *Mad Maxian* California future where burnt-out humans contend with radioactivity, giant mutants, and other post-nuclear evils, FALLOUT was one of those rare games where everything came together. A compelling storyline, awesome dialogue and combat, brilliant art direction that extended from the cut-scenes to the interface to the manual—FALLOUT was a labor of love by hardcore gamers who knew exactly what they were doing. Like any real work of art, FALLOUT not only holds up over time, but actually gets better with age; and it's on a single CD, with no 3D graphics. It's a masterpiece.

StarCraft

Blizzard, 1998

What distinguishes a *CGW* Hall of Fame game from the detritus; what one quality unquestionably confirms enshrinement in the sunless hallowed halls of *CGW*? You could argue concept, game balance, innovation, and flawless execution (and STARCRAFT had all of these and then some) all day, and some goon with half an opinion and a mind to match could always take issue with it. What you cannot argue away is when a game wreaks an insidious, obvious impact on those who play it. From the mimicked Marine order of "Go! Go! Go!" as we herded ourselves into the elevator on our way to lunch; to the transforming of our former strategy editor into an eerie, stats-chanting half-man/half-mainframe—the ripples of STARCRAFT's happy collision with our lives has infiltrated our petty existences like no other real-time strategy game, like no other game.

Dani Bunten Berry

Game Designer

I knew him as Dan Bunten before I knew her as Dani Bunten Berry. And while he changed his sex, he never changed his goal – bringing people together for play and community. Without her work, we might still be trying to figure out online game design.

Quality game design and innovation were her calling cards. In the early WHEELER DEALERS, Bunten Berry introduced an auction mechanism that kept everyone interested while one player sat at the computer. Later, she used multiple controllers in SSI's COMPUTER QUARTERBACK (for simultaneous play calling) and CYTRON MASTERS (futuristic arcade-style combat). She used a printer in CARTELS AND CUTTHROATS, so that five gamers could monitor their corporations via hard copy while one player was taking their turn at the computer. In ROBOT RASCALS, a deck of cards served those players not currently at the computer.

In 1978, she reprised the auction from WHEELER DEALERS and multiple controllers from CYTRON MASTERS in the universally-acclaimed classic M.U.L.E., a planetary exploration/exploitation game that was way ahead of its time. (Rumor has it that Electronic Arts wanted to remake M.U.L.E., but Bunten Berry refused when EA wanted to introduce combat into the mix.)

In 1984, she finished one of the more unique, visionary games in PC gaming history – SEVEN CITIES OF GOLD, a best-selling single-player game of joystick-driven exploration and conquest set in the New World. Soon thereafter, she crafted one of the very first utilities for playing computer games modem-to-modem: MODEM WARS, a combination of combat and football that started EA on its way toward online success. Dani then left EA and moved on to Microprose, where she scored well with COMMAND HQ and GLOBAL CONQUEST.

In July of 1999, Dani Bunten Berry left our world. It's ironic that her most commercially successful game was a single-player game, but we'll never forget her desire to bring people together. In that sense, she didn't leave us alone – even when we were by ourselves at the computer. *–Johnny Wilson*

Johnny Wilson is the former Editor-in-Chief of CGW. He now works for Wizards of the Coast in Seattle, WA.

The Complete CGW HALL of FAME

- **Alone in the Dark** (I-Motion, 1992)
- **The Bard's Tale** (Electronic Arts, 1985)
- **Battle Chess** (Interplay,1988)
- **Battleground series** (TalonSoft, 1995–present)
- **Betrayal at Krondor** (Dynamix,1993)
- **Chessmaster** (Software Toolworks, 1986)
- **Civilization** (MicroProse, 1991)
- **Command & Conquer** (Westwood Studios, 1995)
- **Crusader: No Remorse** (Origin Systems, 1995)
- **Day of the Tentacle** (LucasArts, 1993)
- **Diablo** (Blizzard, 1997)
- **DOOM** (id, 1993)
- **Dungeon Master** (FTL, 1987)
- **Earl Weaver Baseball** (Electronic Arts, 1986)
- **Empire** (Interstel, 1978)
- **F-19 Stealth Fighter** (MicroProse, 1988)
- **Falcon 3.0** (Spectrum HoloByte, 1991)
- **Front Page Sports Football Pro** (Dynamix, 1993)
- **Gettysburg: The Turning Point** (SSI, 1986)
- **Gunship** (MicroProse, 1986)
- **Harpoon** (360 Pacific, 1989)
- **Heroes of Might and Magic II** (New World Computing, 1986)
- **Kampfgruppe** (SSI, 1985)
- **King's Quest V** (Sierra On-Line, 1990)
- **Lemmings** (Psygnosis, 1991)
- **Links 386 Pro** (Access, 1992)
- **M-1 Tank Platoon** (MicroProse, 1989)
- **Master of Magic** (MicroProse, 1994)
- **Master of Orion** (MicroProse, 1993)
- **Mech Brigade** (SSI, 1985)
- **MechWarrior 2** (Activision, 1995)
- **Sid Meier / Game Designer**
- **Might & Magic** (New World Computing, 1986)
- **M.U.L.E.** (Electronic Arts, 1983)
- **Myth** (Bungie, 1997)
- **Panzer General** (SSI, 1994)
- **Pirates!** (MicroProse, 1987)
- **Quake** (id, 1996)
- **Railroad Tycoon** (MicroProse, 1990)
- **Red Baron** (Dynamix, 1990)
- **The Secret of Monkey Island** (LucasArts, 1990)
- **SimCity** (Maxis, 1987)
- **Starflight** (Electronic Arts, 1986)
- **Tetris** (Spectrum Holobyte,1988)
- **Their Finest Hour** (LucasArts, 1989)
- **TIE Fighter** (LucasArts, 1994)
- **Tomb Raider** (Eidos, 1996)
- **Ultima III** (Origin Systems, 1983)
- **Ultima IV** (Origin Systems, 1985)
- **Ultima VI** (Origin Systems, 1990)
- **Ultima Underworld** (Origin Systems, 1992)
- **War in Russia** (SSI, 1984)
- **WarCraft II** (Blizzard, 1996)
- **Wasteland** (Interplay, 1986)
- **Wing Commander** (Origin Systems, 1990)
- **Wing Commander II** (Origin Systems, 1991)
- **Wing Commander III** (Origin Systems, 1994)
- **Wizardry** (Sir-Tech, 1981)
- **Wolfenstein 3-D** (id, 1992)
- **X-COM** (MicroProse, 1994)
- **You Don't Know Jack** (Berkeley Systems, 1996)
- **Zork** (Infocom, 1981)

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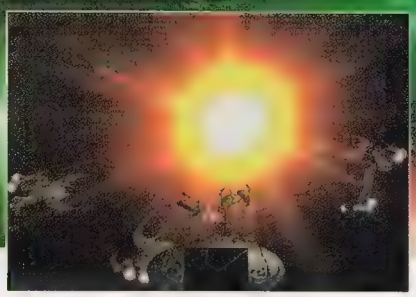

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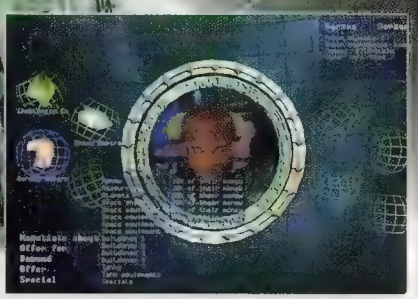

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HOW DO WE RATE?

Outstanding The rare game that gets it all right. A must-play experience.

Very Good Worthy of your time and money, but there are drawbacks.

Average Either an ambitious design with major flaws, or just vanilla.

Weak Seriously lacking in play value, poorly conceived, or just another clone.

Abysmal The rare game that gets it all wrong. Pathetic. Coaster material.

We reviews only finished games—no betas, no patches.

SPOTLIGHT REVIEW: THIEF II: THE METAL AGE

The First-Person-Sneaker Returns With More Intense, Thoughtful Gameplay

Stealing Beauty

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD EDITORS' CHOICE

ACTION

reviewed by Thomas L. McDonald

PRETTY LIGHTS Effective use of colored lighting makes the Dark engine look better than ever, despite being over two years old.

THIEF subverted all the rules of the first-person shooter. Instead of running pell-mell through a 3D environment, you crept along slowly and carefully. Rather than providing a muscle-bound, armor-clad hero, you were made a fragile thief who crumbled under a few sword hits. A dazzling array of arms? Bah! You got a small sword, a blackjack, and a bow. (And the blackjack didn't even *kill* anyone – it just knocked them out!) Looking for a cast of monsters conjured from the pits of hell? Sorry, but you mostly got human guards and some undead. Flying in the face of the body-count games, Looking Glass offered an anti-shooter where the true measure of skill was in never having to draw any blood.

Why would anyone want to play such a game? Possibly because it was one of the most tense, evocative, and engrossing first-person games ever created. Its unique qualities were key to its appeal, and those qualities have been honed to a killing (so to speak) edge in THIEF II: THE METAL AGE. THIEF II is not full-step forward, mind you. One could argue that it's a glorified add-on pack, but it wouldn't be a very convincing argument. Everything in THIEF II is bigger, sharper, better, and more effective. The engine has been refined rather than rebuilt, but those refinements add immeasurably to the overall quality of the game. It may be built on a modified version of an aging engine, and it may not offer the radical changes one would expect from a full sequel, but it stands toe-to-toe with the best first-person games out there.

It Still Takes a Thief

THIEF II finds the master thief Garrett still plying his trade after having defeated the Trickster of THIEF: THE DARK PROJECT. You begin the game with a few milk-run levels to line your pockets and to get those sneaking skills sharp

CGW RATED

PROS

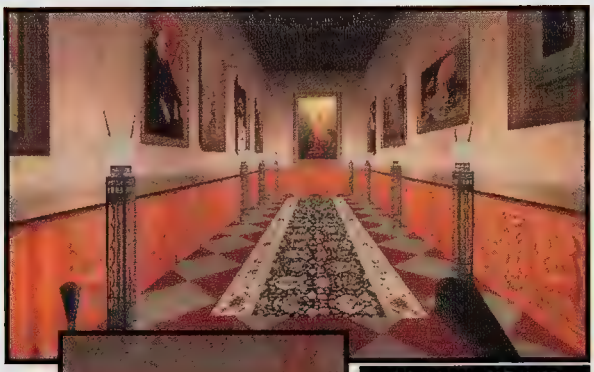
An uncommon, complex gaming experience requiring stealth and logic over mayhem in rich, evocative locations.

CONS

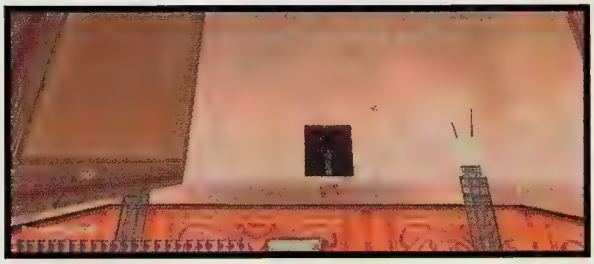
Graphics are good but not state-of-the-art. Lack of multiplayer may bother some, but the game doesn't lend itself to it.

Requirements: Pentium-II 266, 48MB RAM, 250MB hard drive space, 3D card.
Recommended Requirements: Pentium-III 400, 64MB RAM, 500MB hard drive space.
3D Support: Direct3D **Multiplayer Support:** None

Publisher: Eidos • **Developer:** Looking Glass • **$40** • **www.lglass.com**
ESRB Rating: Mature; animated violence and blood.



THE VALUE OF ART It pays to read all those little signs, since they hold valuable clues for level solutions and the locations of hidden treasure. At the end of this hallway is a large portrait. Fire an arrow into the gem in the painting, and a secret compartment opens to reveal some loot.



again. As Garrett returns home from the second mission, he's ambushed and barely escapes. He begins searching for the person who ordered the assassination, with all paths leading to the new law-and-order Sheriff Gorman Truart. From there, the story takes off and keeps twisting, level by level, until the end. Narrative is provided largely through stylized sepia-hued (and occasionally color) cut-scenes, but plenty of information, character, and story develops in-mission. Objectives might change abruptly with a sudden plot twist, or a letter may reveal the hidden workings of the various secret societies. It's a fluid narrative with plenty of momentum and intrigue, keeping you moving from level to level throughout the 15 missions.

The levels themselves are simply stunning. The Dark engine, used for the original as well as for SYSTEM SHOCK II, has been extensively modified to meet the demands of the cutthroat 3D-game market. It rises to the occasion, but you won't mistake it for UNREAL or Q3 – nor do you need to. Textures were pretty blotchy in the original, but they are much finer here thanks in part to the addition of 16-bit color depth. The only place where technology lets down the game is in outside and other natural locations. The Dark engine can't handle complex curving surfaces very well. Trees look like pylons, bushes are flat, and caves are a little too angular. Though the engine works beautifully for the straight line of a mansion or rooftop, it can't quite pull off an entire forest.

Higher poly-counts allow for more detail in the models, and locations themselves are exponentially larger than those in the original. Lighting has been significantly enhanced, which is important for a game that relies so heavily on the concealment of shadows and threat of light.

Finally, sound design is far more expansive. Full EAX support pro-

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"The curse of the *Star Trek* license is alive and well and living at Activision, where they have again demonstrated that the *Star Trek* name is synonymous with deeply flawed games."

– Tom Chick, reviewing STAR TREK: ARMADA"

Nomar, I Beg You

By Tom Price

I'm not sure what I was looking forward to more this Spring: playing HIGH HEAT 2001, or drafting my team for our office HH2K1 league. Because as anyone who's ever fooled around with fantasy baseball knows, drafting is a unique game unto itself that involves a lot of strategy, planning, and of course, wack theories. So after much scouting, research, and wack theorizing, the editorial staff gathered in a dark and smoky back room to talk a few trades, talk a little trash, but mostly to just talk baseball.

I pulled the nine spot in our 11-person draft, so a lot of A-list players were going to be gone before my first pick. I expected Pedro Martinez and Randy Johnson to go early. Then I figured there might be a run on shortstops what with only three or four seriously talented players at that position. At worst, I could pick up a power-hitting outfielder or 1st baseman, maybe even Sosa or McGwire. But once the picking got underway, only pitchers were being taken. As my turn approached, and names like Millwood, Clemens, and Hampton were being called out, my heart pounded. My eyes kept moving farther and farther up my depth chart until I got to my number-one dream pick, the guy I would have picked even if I had the first draft pick overall. When it got to be my turn, I said in a confident yet disbelieving (at my own good fortune) voice: "Nomar." Yes, that Nomar. The Nomar who hit .357 last year with a .603 slugging average. The Nomar whose fielding is rated at 97 and arm at 96. Nomar Garciafreakingparra. What's wrong with you fools?! Me and Nomar are going all the way this year, baby!!! Of course, my pitching rotation could use some help. Doh!

JUNE REVIEWS

GAME	RATING
Arcomage	★★★★★
Command & Conquer: Tiberian Sun Firestorm	★★★★★
Fighter Ace 2	★★★★★
Force Commander	★★★★★
Invictus	★★★★★
KA-52 Alligator	★★★★★
Majesty	★★★★★
Microsoft Baseball 2001	★★★★★
Risk II	★★★★★
Sammy Sosa High Heat 2001	★★★★½
Sammy Sosa Softball Slam	★★★★★
Shadow Watch	★★★★★
Soldier of Fortune	★★★★★
Star Trek: Armada	★★★★★
Thief 2	★★★★½
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2000	★★★★★
Rogue Spear Mission Pack: Urban Operations	★★★★½
X: Beyond The Frontier	★★★★★

Outnumbered. But Not Outsmarted.

I'm Going In

Sent in behind enemy lines for a routine track and capture, you take on the role of Dave Llewelyn Jones, a British and US operative. Suddenly caught between greed and treason this assignment evolves into a solo mission of stealth and retaliation. Infiltrate the toughest military installations with the latest NATO spy gear and assault weapons. You've survived worse...but not by much.

Use stealth and guile against an enemy AI that reacts sharply to your every action. Guards track you with actual military tactics.

You'll need your skills in thievery, computer hacking, sabotage, and recon to defeat enemy surveillance, bunkers, tanks, and gunships.

Revolutionary game engine technology allows vast panoramic landscapes with binoculars and satellite communications systems that have a virtually unlimited zoom capability.

RATING PENDING RP Rating Pending

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INNERLOOP

EIDOS INTERACTIVE

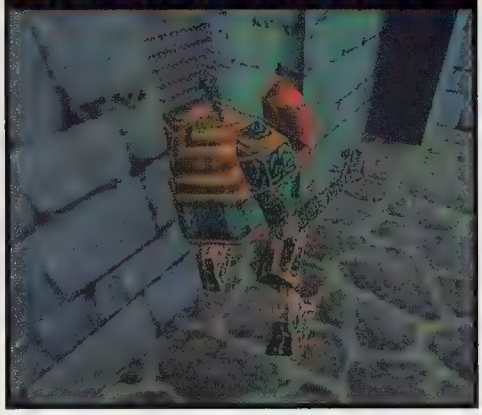
eidos.com

vides a dynamic soundscape that is integral to the stealth gameplay of THIEF. Audio cues in other games are rarely this important to actual gameplay, and their implementation is well nigh flawless. The use of scripted dialogue has also been expanded. A lot of this is atmospheric babble, drunken gibberish, and chitchat, but extensive overheard dialogue scenes (some heard through doors and walls) also play a crucial role in storytelling.

DON'T MECH ME MAD Unlike the little mechs, their bigger brothers pack a heavy mortar punch. They, too, can be felled by water, but it's a little harder.

EAVESDROPPING Listening in on the scripted conversations between both humans and ghosts is key to the game and the story, often revealing pertinent facts and clues.

SLIPPERY WHEN WET These little mechanized maintenance things wander around babbling, but don't attack. They can alert guards, so take them out with water arrows.



Casing the Joint

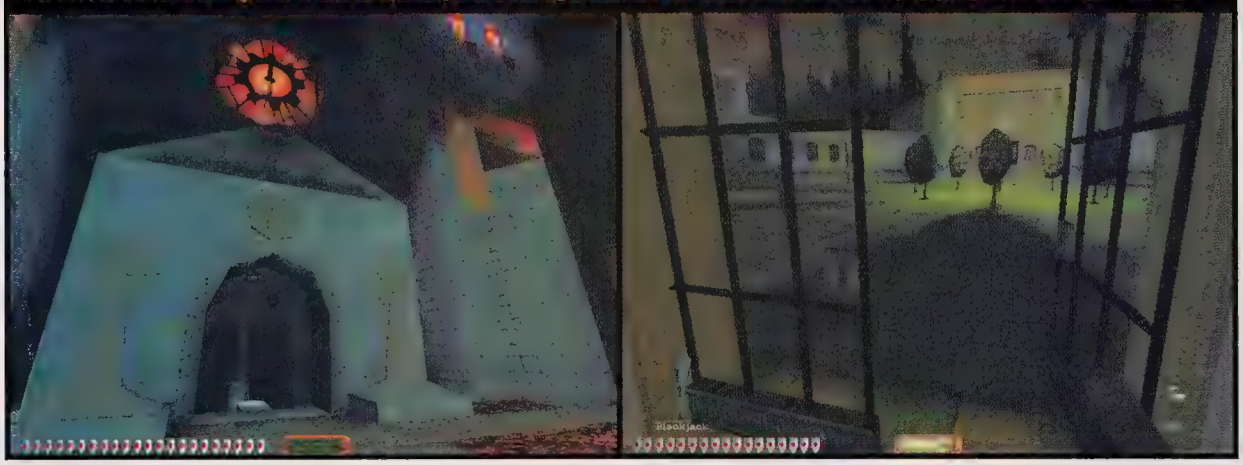
Level design is vast and intricate. The first seven levels all take place in realistic locations, among them the massive central bank, a labyrinthine warehouse complex, and Truart's estate. Following the attempt on your life, you make your way through the snaking alleys of the city to your home, then have to double back and sneak into another sector of the city in one of the more unusual levels. You'll return to those city streets later for a very different type of mission that forces you to use a new approach to the same location. The architecture within the levels is astonishingly complex and often beautiful, with sudden shifts in color scheme and decoration. Even flooring plays a central role in strategy. The marble floors of the bank make stealth extremely difficult. Do you choose a carpeted path with one set of obstacles, or an uncarpeted path with another?

All these decisions make up the fundamental gameplay of THIEF II, and they are wholly unique to this series. The game isn't about force, but about evaluating a situation and approaching it logically. You stick to the shadows, creep, pick locks, steal, and work your way through these marvelous locations. The primary tool at your command isn't a weapon (the sword is a last resort), but specialty arrows. Water arrows knock out torches, rope arrows help you climb, moss arrows silence foot steps, and so forth. Some new potions have been added – one to make you invisible for a very short time, another which allows you to jump from heights uninjured – but most of your load-out is the same as it was in the first game. It would have made little sense to add weapons to a game like this. The biggest new item in your bag is an orb that functions as a remote camera. Throw it down a hallway, and you get a 360-degree view of the situation. All of these items are very carefully balanced for each level, so you still can't take money and items from level to level.

Mission structure is much tighter this time around. A large part of this can be attributed to more effective level design and larger locations with more byways to explore. In many cases, you need scratch only about 40% of a level's secrets to solve it and move on. More interestingly, multi-tiered goals also help to keep each level fresh. Difficulty settings can be changed for each mission, with the changes mostly impacting three areas: a higher gold count, limitations on killing or knocking out people, and more effective AI. This final area features some of THIEF II's most complex additions (see sidebar). Guards have deep AI, with variables on the higher difficulty levels that will give them more complex responses and routes.

Comparing THIEF II to any traditional first-person game is futile. They merely share a perspective. Someone demanding state-of-the-art graphics will certainly be disappointed in the plain, but effective, visuals. Someone who values form over content would also probably be disappointed by the gameplay as well, since it is demanding, thoughtful, and complex. This is a "boutique" game: a gamer's game. It pays its dividends in persistent tension rather than in bursts of fear. It still pumps as much adrenaline, but it works on a subtler level. It's the difference between *Stranger on a Train* and *Armageddon*; between the intimated and the explicit. In intent, design, execution, and strategy, THIEF II – like Looking Glass – stands alone. CGW

ARCHITEXTURE One thing THIEF II does exceptionally well is soaring architecture. The 15-odd levels have some eye-popping sights and elegant buildings.



3DO continues to be beddy beddy good to us.

Turning up the Heat

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD EDITORS' CHOICE

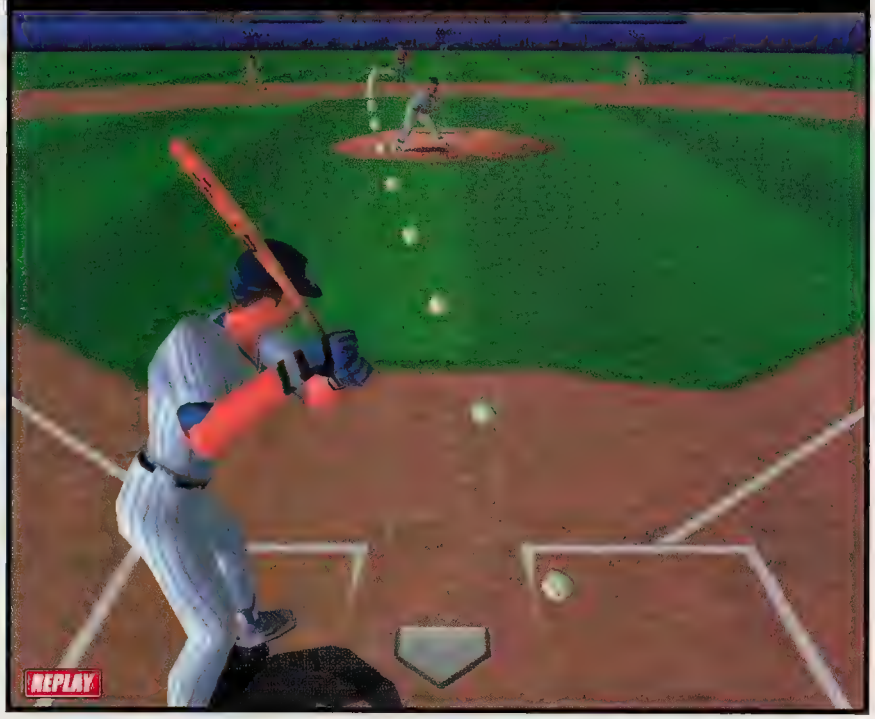
SAMMY SOSA'S HIGH HEAT BASEBALL 2001

reviewed by Tom Price

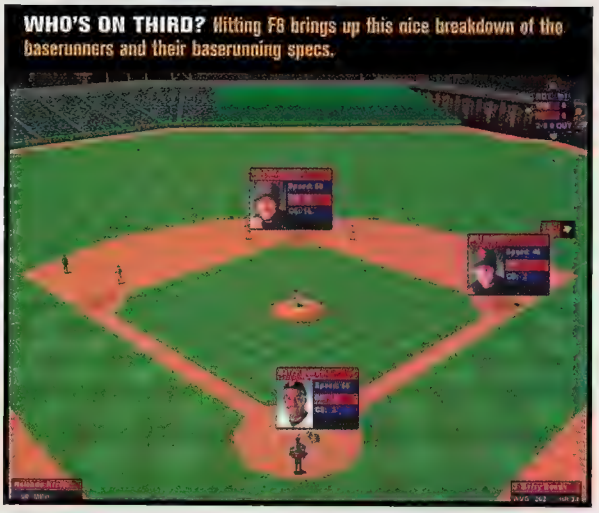
OK, so it wasn't bottom of the ninth, bases loaded, two outs. But my first real "now that's baseball" moment playing the new SAMMY SOSA'S HIGH HEAT BASEBALL 2001 was no less dramatic.

My team that I drafted for the *CGW* office league is in the field, and division rival Robert Coffey's team is at the plate. It's top of the sixth, two outs, man on third, and I'm clinging to a one-run lead when Todd Zeile spanks a grounder that takes a funny bounce off the right side of the mound. Jeff Kent gets fooled by the bad bounce and the ball caroms off his foot. Thank God my first pick in the draft was spent on Nomar Garciaparra, because he was right there to back up Kent, scooping up the errant ball and rocketing it over to first base for the third out, saving the run. I must have watched the replay at least 10 times.

LOOK AT IT! Instant replays for strikeouts precludes that tapping of the "R" key by incredulous batters.



WHO'S ON THIRD? Hitting F8 brings up this nice breakdown of the baserunners and their baserunning specs.



A Perfect Game

SAMMY SOSA'S HIGH HEAT BASEBALL 2001 is nothing less than the greatest baseball game of all time, and the most realistic simulation of any sport on the PC. I know we said hyperbolic things like that about last year's installment, but HH2K1 improves upon that game enough to rise above the status of incremental sports-game sequel. Yes, at the core, it is the same excellently balanced baseball sim that captivated the *CGW* offices for months. It became such a spectator sport that everyone on staff has signed up to play in this year's league. People who don't know the difference between a four-bagger and a four-seam fastball have been enthralled by the experience of playing in a baseball league and drafting a team of real-life players, thanks to HH2K1's amazing infusion of the heart and soul of baseball.

Those of you who've become accustomed to the feel of HH2K's gameplay don't have to worry about relearning for HH2K1. The basic game engine is the same, but the controls have been significantly tightened up. Players are far more responsive to commands, unlike last year when there were excruciating split-second delays between your pushing of the button and when the fielder actually threw the ball. This, plus deficient AI, made base-running a bit of a nightmare last time around, but that's been improved dramatically in HH2K1 (i.e., your runners actually move on a two-out fly ball). The sublime pitcher/batter interface – the feature that separated last year's edition from every other baseball game ever made –has thankfully not been tinkered with. And it may seem like a minor detail, but the addition of the ability to choose whether or not to hit the cutoff man will have a huge impact on gameplay, just as it does in real life.

CGW RATED

PROS

Now THIS is baseball!

CONS

It's also a little buggy, and the player-models could use a makeover.

Requirements: Pentium 166MHz, 32 MB RAM, 110MB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-II 350MHz, 64MB RAM, 250MB hard drive space. **3D Support:** Direct3D **Multiplayer Support:** Hot seat, LAN, Internet, TCP/IP, IPX.

Publisher: 3DO • Developer: 3DO • $30 • www.3do.com • ESRB Rating: Everyone

Last year's HIGH HEAT was beaten by its competition in only one category: graphics. This year's model takes a significant bite out of that competitive gap. The graphics are cleaner, animations are smoother, and the player models are more varied. It's nice to have more than just one Nomar-esque player model, as was the case in HH2000. There are three basic player-types this year, plus varying heights that have an effect on strike zones. So Mark McGwire looks different than Randy Johnson who looks different than Sammy Sosa. It does add a dose of realism, but the models still look a bit too weird to be called "realistic." They look better out in the field, thanks in part to a load of new animations like underhanded or behind-the-back throws, new diving catches, and collisions with the outfield wall. Additionally, if no one is on base, your infielders will stretch and fidget randomly between pitches. And for that Nelson Muntz he-he factor, batters will now fall down in the batter's box if they whiff too hard. Now that 3DO has refined the game's engine to the point of near-perfection, maybe they can improve the player models and overall graphics.

I'LL TUMBLE FOR YOU HIGH HEAT's useful replay VCR feature lets you enjoy the improved animations, like this dive and roll catch.

The game's presentation has been greatly improved upon as well. Small pictures of the players accompany their stat boxes, as well as the "next three batters" graphic that appears between innings and at the bullpen screen. Also, when the batter steps up at the beginning of each half-inning, you get a complete breakdown of their season and game stats, as well as pitcher stats and pitches thrown.

The most welcome addition to HH2K1 is the improved custom-league options. Last year's game was rather restrictive in allowing you to set up your own league. This year's installment allows you to adjust the number of divisions and teams, as well as to adjust the number of regular season and playoff games. The computer generates a schedule automatically, but you can choose to favor intradivisional games as well as an All-Star game and interleague play. If you really loved the teams you drafted for HH2K, you can import them into your HH2K1 season as well.

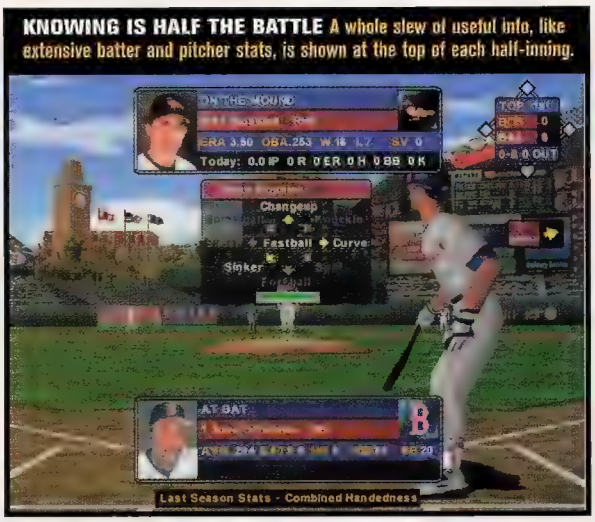
A BEAUTIFUL NIGHT FOR BASEBALL San Francisco's new Pac Bell park is beautifully rendered for day, night, and evening games as are Houston's new Enron field and Comerica Park in Detroit. Classic ballparks featured in the game include the Polo Grounds, Crosley Field, and Seals Stadium in San Francisco.

Check Swing

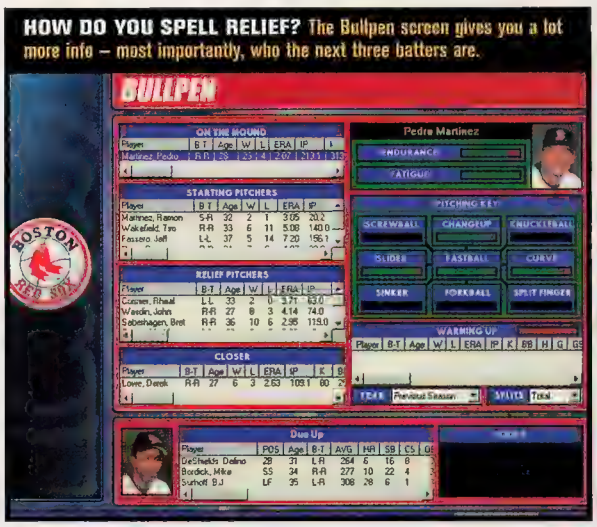
The only thing checking our enthusiasm for the game is the fair number of bugs that shipped with it. Last year's edition shipped buggier, but the flaws in HHB2K1 are too numerous to not be called out. The bug we've seen the most in *CGW*'s extensive early play occurs sometimes when pulling a double switch. There have also been reports of disappearing players, stat glitches, and misplaced textures. 3DO is planning a patch, and if the success of last year's patch release is any indicator, then everything should be fixed soon. Other issues – like the ridiculously high number of errors – can't be counted as bugs, since they're adjustable in the "tune file".

We couldn't have asked for much more with HH2K1. It's possessing of everything that a sequel to a future Hall-of-Fame game should: good gameplay that doesn't stray too far from the original, and added features that were desperately needed or just plain cool. HIGH HEAT's perfect blend of arcade and sim elements – plus all of the refinements made to HH2K1 – make it one of the best sports games ever, and the closest thing to real-life baseball that can be experienced anywhere but the diamond. Playing it, I guarantee you will catch yourself saying, "Now that's baseball." CGW

KNOWING IS HALF THE BATTLE A whole slew of useful info, like extensive batter and pitcher stats, is shown at the top of each half-inning.


ON THE MOUND
ERA 3.50 OBA .253 W 18 L 7 SV 0
Today: 0.0 IP 0 R 0 ER 0 H 0 BB 0 K
Changeup
Fastball Curve
Sinker
AT BAT
Last Season Stats - Combined Handedness

HOW DO YOU SPELL RELIEF? The Bullpen screen gives you a lot more info – most importantly, who the next three batters are.



Putting Down a Rebellion in Real Time

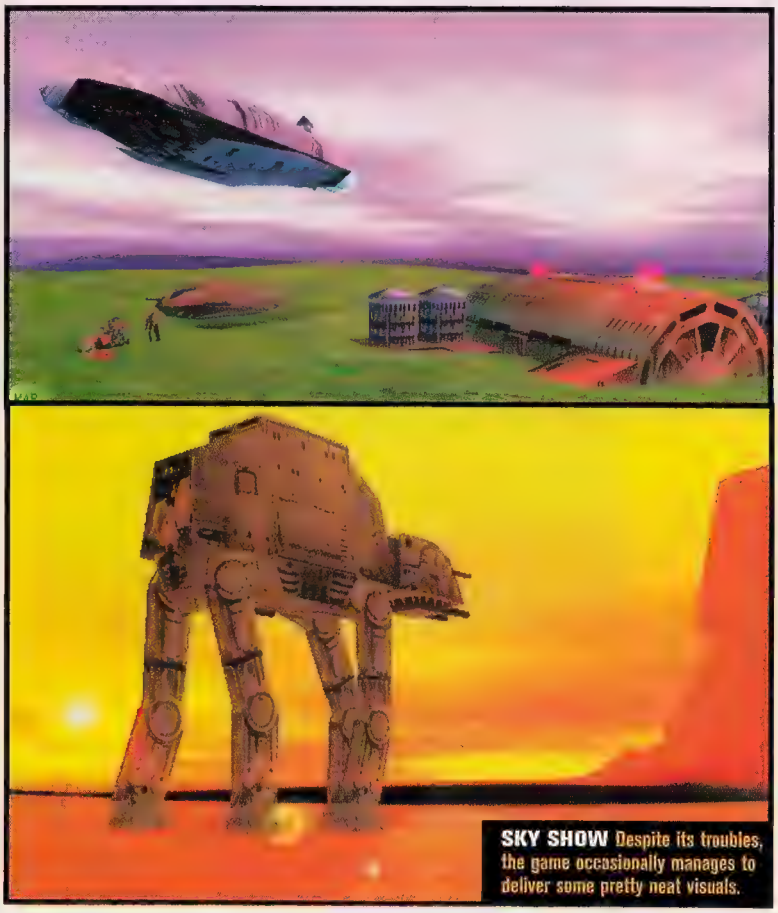
Forced Commander

FORCE COMMANDER's appeal is undeniable – finally, a game that gives us the chance to re-enact many of the action sequences from the *Star Wars* movies! Better yet, you get to do it on both sides of the conflict. As the Empire, you get to scour Tatooine for escaped droids, and knock out the shield generator on Hoth. As the Rebel Alliance, you get to use Leia and C-3PO to convert the Ewoks, and you'll try to get Han Solo inside that shield bunker in time.

You'll command the same forces that were featured in the trilogy: AT-ATs, Y-Wings, Stormtroopers, Dewbacks, and those cool flying speed cycles from *Return of the Jedi*, along with several new units. And better yet, everything's built to scale in this 3D real-time strategy game, one of the very first of its kind. Sounds great, right?

FORCE COMMANDER
reviewed by Mark Clarkson

Unfortunately, like duct tape, Twinkies, and *Eight is Enough* reruns, FORCE COMMANDER has both a light and a dark side.



SKY SHOW Despite its troubles, the game occasionally manages to deliver some pretty neat visuals.

Harvest This!

You don't have to harvest or build in FORCE COMMANDER; instead, you order units, which are then delivered from orbiting ships by a variety of shuttles – one for buildings, one for heavy armor such as AT-ATs, and one for troops and light armor.

This process is a solid, realistic idea, but it's far more cumbersome than it should be. You only have access to one shuttle of each type, and queuing up orders is out of the question. So if you want two dozen Stormtroopers, you have to request six (the most the shuttle can carry) and manually select an acceptable landing site. Then you wait for the shuttle to descend, offload the troops, and return to orbit. Then you manually do it all over again...and you do it three more times.

Even selecting a landing site is overly difficult. Shuttles can only land adjacent to your command base (or mobile-command base, in later missions). You'll spend long seconds sliding your cursor around, hunting for an acceptably flat spot, while your forces are under attack elsewhere. Granted, many real-time strategy games do offer similar aggravations; but here the frustration is constant, accompanying every new piece of equipment or squad of troops.

Command Points are the currency of the game, and you earn them by accomplishing mission objectives. Destroy a Hovertank or capture a bunker, and the accounting department grants you CPs, which you can trade for more stuff. But here's the rub: If your mission goes well, you don't necessarily need reinforcements; but if enemy forces are hammering you, you probably aren't capturing many objectives, so you get no CPs and no reinforcements. Once you start to lose in FORCE COMMANDER, battles quickly slide downhill.

I, Probot

Sadly, the game's biggest surprise is its deeply-flawed pathfinding and movement AI, which took me back to the bad old days of the original COMMAND AND CONQUER. Units (even air units!) get stuck in corners, beat their heads against the terrain, and sometimes chase each other in endless circles around buildings. Groups separate and meander around in exasperating, confused clusters. Three out of four units may find their way through a canyon while the fourth just spins in place, dervish-like. Aren't these the real-time strategy problems of yesteryear?

Units also clip through structures and each other, occasionally crawling completely inside a building and disappearing, becoming useless, impossible to select, but nevertheless continuing to futilely fire without effect.

CGW RATED

PROS

You actually get to play through *Star Wars* plots from the movie trilogy.

CONS

Myriad interface and AI problems severely mar what could have been a great game.

Requirements: Pentium 266 with 64 MB RAM, 8MB PCI or AGP Direct3D graphics accelerator. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium II.
3D Support: Direct3D, Glide **Multiplayer Support:** 4 players via LAN or Internet, 2 players via modem.

Publisher: LucasArts • Developer: Ronin Entertainment • $40 • www.lucasarts.com
ESRB Rating: Teen (13+)

BORN TO RIDE Six stormtroopers on three speeder bikes make a quick, effective strike force. If that rebel-command base isn't garrisoned, it's in trouble.

Worse, you can't simply select a misguided unit and give it a new destination. You must select it, stop its current action, and then give it a new destination. Sometimes even this doesn't work the first time...or the second. If you're desperate, you can always hit the delete key and blow the damn thing up.

The icing on the cake is that the missions seem to emphasize precisely the kind of action the game engine does least well: working large groups up winding ramps or down narrow canyons.

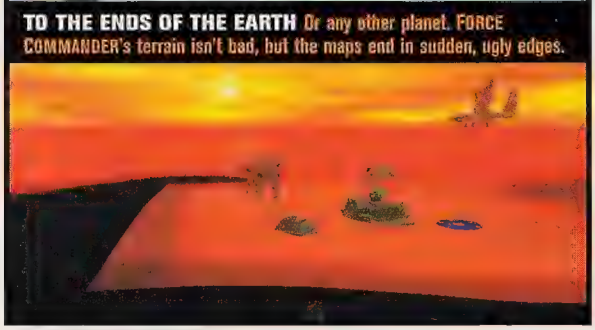
But Wait, There's More

FORCE COMMANDER's clunky interface consumes over a third of the screen. Granted, you can close it, but by doing so you lose vital information – including unit health. The text is ugly and blurry when it appears at all; unit descriptions and menu items are usually rendered as solid yellow blocks (LucasArts blames this on 3DFX's drivers).

The list of poor design decisions continues. In true 3D-fashion, you can freely position the camera as you play. Unfortunately, the camera controls are also awkward and clunky. Units are ridiculously hard to select, and grouping them together is even more frustrating. And in the "What were they thinking?" category, grouped and numbered units lose their grouping once inside a building or transport vehicle. Dump your crack squad of troops out of an armored transport, and you'll have to painfully re-select and regroup each of them. This is not fun when in combat.

FORCE COMMANDER was a great idea – t's too bad that a myriad of gameplay flaws bring it down. Playing this RTS is like trying to eat spaghetti with a spoon; there's good stuff in there, but you can't get at it. CGW

SAY AGAIN? The text is often missing altogether, making simple chores like saving games a little more of a challenge.



TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH Or any other planet. FORCE COMMANDER's terrain isn't bad, but the maps end in sudden, ugly edges.

EAT IT, VADER!

7 Force-ful Ways to Stun Your Enemies

1. When playing as the Empire, use Speeder Bikes to build a quick strike force. At the beginning of the game, four to six troopers on bikes can take every supply bunker on the map; or storm the enemy base and capture the command center before they know what hit them.

2. Garrison everything. Put troops in your command base, your turrets, and your AT-ATs to prevent easy takeovers by the enemy. You'll want to keep several squads around at all times, to re-capture bunkers and so forth, and they're much safer tucked inside buildings and bunkers than just standing out in the open.

3. Don't destroy enemy turrets, bunkers, and buildings. Capture them. Nothing annoys your opponent more than turning his own turrets against him.

4. When playing as the Rebellion, you can turn the tide of a battle by employing a few Infiltrators when your opponent is pre-occupied. These troopers are great for capturing enemy buildings and vehicles – just one Infiltrator can capture an expensive Imperial AT-AT and drive it home.

5. Anti-air units target incoming shuttles. If you work your well-protected AT-AA's and Hovertanks in close to your opponent's base, you might be able to deny him reinforcements.

6. Remember that AT-ATs can target air units, but only with their chin guns.

7. Keyboard shortcuts are essential to mastering the game, but there's no easy way to redefine them. An undocumented text file hidden deep in the game-directory tree holds the key. Here's the path: \Force Commander\Resource\forcecommand\Focom Translation\keyboard.txt.

Make sure you back the file up before experimenting.

Commander LaForge, Set the Controls for the Heart of the Sun

Initiate Self-Destruct

The curse of the *Star Trek* license is alive and well and living at Activision, where they have again demonstrated that the *Star Trek* name is synonymous with deeply flawed games. ARMADA is a good game pinned under the mediocrity that has afflicted most of Activision's internally-developed titles (I-82 and CIVILIZATION: CALL TO POWER come to mind). It is almost entirely lacking in AI; it is saddled with some awful interface glitches; and it's stitched together with a desultory, uninteresting storyline.

The first and biggest problem is the game's lack of a functional AI. The single-player missions are scripted well enough to hide this. But when you play a skirmish game, you're in for a world of disappointment. There are serious pathfinding problems. The AI doesn't appreciate the importance of resource gathering. It sends unescorted mining and construction ships hither and yon. It doesn't seem to understand how the special weapons work. It doesn't use terrain to its advantage. And these are all above and beyond the typical AI problems that plague most RTS games: The computer dribbles out a few units at a time to attack; it doesn't adequately defend its base; and it makes some awful unit-building choices. The end result is a single-player game that presents almost zero challenge, even at the hardest difficulty level.

STAR TREK: ARMADA
reviewed by Tom Chick

Activision also let some nasty glitches slip through the Quality Assurance cracks. The initial release was plagued with some surprising incompatibility problems. The interface, which actually does a good job of making units' special weapons easy to use, is jagged in places. The hot keys are merely convoluted menu shortcuts. There's no building queue for construction ships. Transporters – which are used to manage your own crew pool and to attack enemy ships – are far too hard to manage, but far too important not to manage. The game desperately needs a mouse-sensitivity setting, and sometimes clicks and key presses won't take. Then, there are some really odd choices: the Escape key will minimize the game, crashing it on some video cards, and you can't see what you're typing when you chat in multiplayer games.

Real-Time Redemption

But ARMADA is not a total wash, particularly when you remove the AI from the equation and play against other humans. The special weapons (which are similar to unit spells in other RTS games) are a well-balanced system of trumps and counter-trumps, unique for each race. Unfortunately, Activision was a bit too timid when it came to differentiating the play mechanics for each race; ARMADA is no STARCRAFT. But it does offer some unique additions to the genre, such as crew serving as transferable "hit points" for ships, a physics model that creates the illusion of flight – even though the game is played on 2D maps, the implementation of ship systems in useful and important ways, and some clever ideas for terrain in space.

The 3D engine does a glorious job of bringing the battles to life. There's something regal and fearsome about a formation of Romulan Warbirds sweeping onto a starbase, a Borg cube emerging from the shadows, or a brightly-colored Sovereign-class ship emerging from a Federation shipyard. With lurid weapon and shield effects and dramatic explosions, the battles in ARMADA look truly epic. Activision has captured the spectacle of the *Star Trek* license in a way that the TV show's budget couldn't. But was this spectacle at the expense of a better game? Playing ARMADA, you can clearly see the foundation for a solid game design, perched on the verge of greatness. And Activision has given it one little nudge – in exactly the wrong direction. It's small consolation that ARMADA is the best bad *Star Trek* game out there. CGW

ALL TOGETHER NOW A pack of Romulan Griffin pound a starbase.

RING OF FIRE Klingons and Federation bases don't mix.

SPECIAL EFFECTS Brilliant lights and space effects bring the universe to life. Too bad they can't resuscitate the AI.

CGW RATED

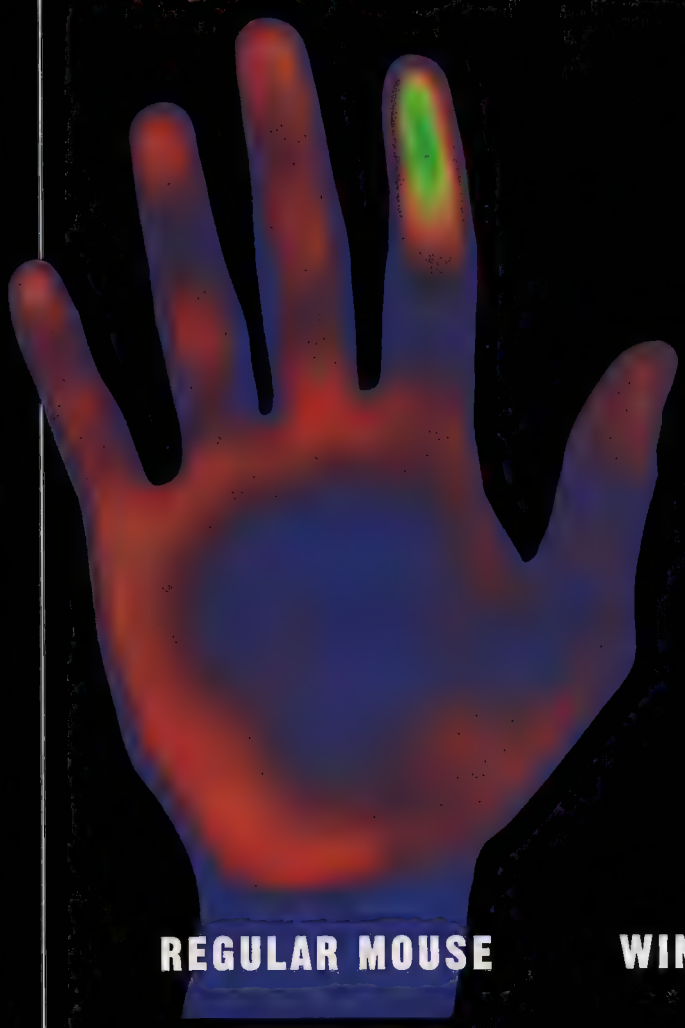
PROS
It's got lovely, epic graphics and a good sense of balance.

CONS
It's got a few too many jagged edges and an AI with no sense.

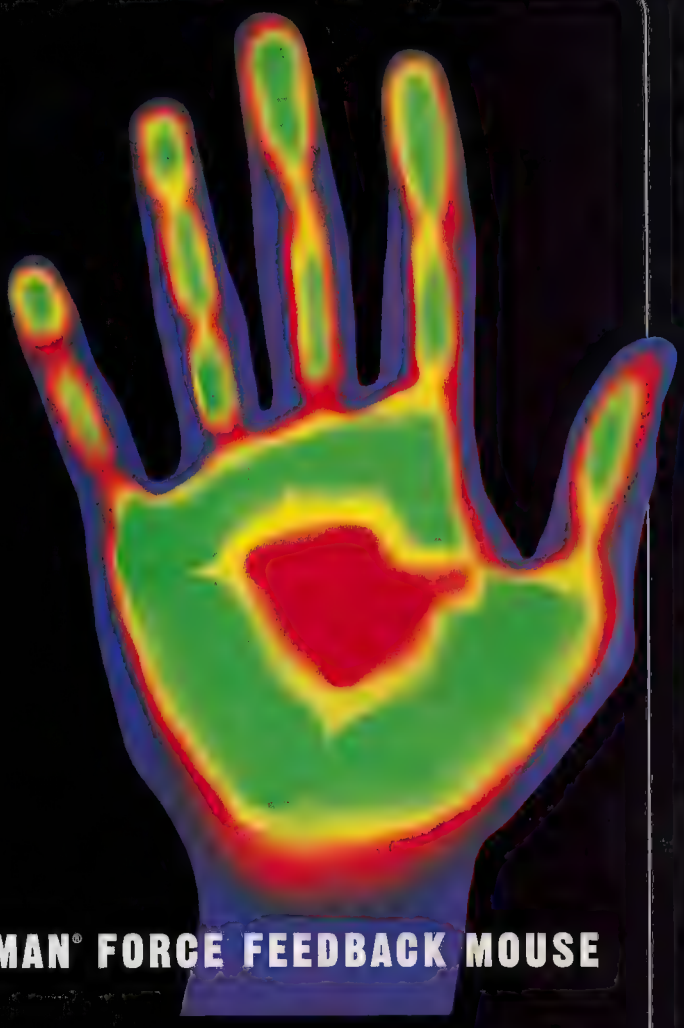
Requirements: Pentium 200, 32MB RAM, 600MB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** 64MB RAM **3D Support:** Direct3D
Multiplayer Support: LAN, Internet (4-7 players), one CD per player.

Publisher: Activision • Developer: Activision • $50 • www.activision.com
ESRB Rating: Everyone; mild language, animated violence.

WingMan



REGULAR MOUSE



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† This is gibberish, meant to illustrate the incredible features of the WingMan® Force Feedback Mouse. Super-ultrasensical isn't a word. Metacarpal is. It means hand. And tactograms? Again, not a word. But it sounds cool.

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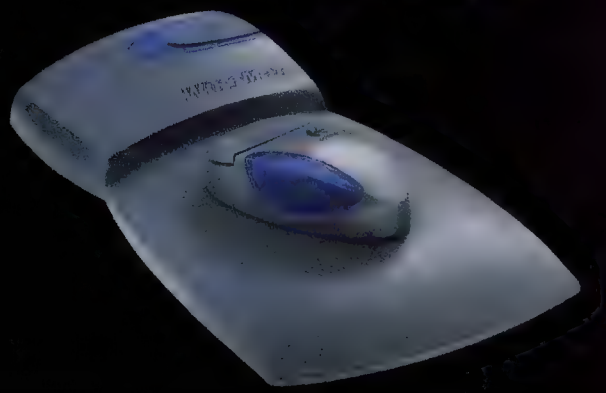

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Logitech®

Space Truckers Have a New Game to Call Their Own

X-treme Tedium

There are lots of roles I'd like to play in my games, but long-haul trucker is not one of them – even if it's a long-haul trucker in space. Yet here I am, taking the monotonous inter-stellar trip from Seizewell to Thrunk's Pride to get a good price on some crystalline goop in my cargo hold. Even though I hear only the drone of my ship's power plant, I now fully understand the *Eagles* crooner who sang, "Don't let the sound of your own wheels make you crazy."

X: BEYOND THE FRONTIER gives a whole lot of exposition for relatively little in-game story. You get to hear all of this ballyhoo about man flittering around space and fighting off evil mechanical terraformers, but that's all thrown out once you enter the game as a guinea pig for an experimental ship. The experiment ends up flinging you into a whole other galaxy, where the primary challenge is not fighting ultimate evil, but buying low and selling high.

X: BEYOND THE FRONTIER
Reviewed by Thierry Nguyen

A Rich Man's Galaxy

X is a space trading game with combat thrown in. Think of it as a modernized ELITE. While there *is* a plot involving aliens and battles and whatnot, combat is not the emphasis. This de-emphasis is apparent in your ship's design. While the ship can be armed and shielded, the physics model gives it the feel of a lumbering transport. Combat is more akin to the slow, deliberate movements of bombers than to the fluid dance of typical space fighters.

As in ELITE, you define your role in the universe. You can do whatever the heck you want. You can relegate yourself to a life of shipping prophylactics to neighboring colonies, or perhaps become a bounty hunter for the locals, or just start robbing everyone blind and become the local crime lord of a star system. Not only can you ship/steal goods in your own craft, but you can set up your own personal planetary outposts. If there're a lot of refineries in a system, buy yourself a mining station, bilk money out of the refineries, and become the Ore Baron.

Freedom's Folly

Alas, FREESPACE 2 upped the standards for space sim eye-candy, and while X doesn't look like it was made in '92, it doesn't match up to FREESPACE 2 either. The space backdrops are nice, but a bit washed-out, and the ships tend to be on the conservative side in terms of design. Aurally, the game is standard fare for the most part, with one exception: speech. The voice-overs seem to be recorded unevenly, as the quality will waver between normal and throat-cancer-without-a-voice-box. Worse yet, there is no option for subtitles; if you're planning on following the loose plot to the end, be prepared to strain your ears when engaged in critical conversations.

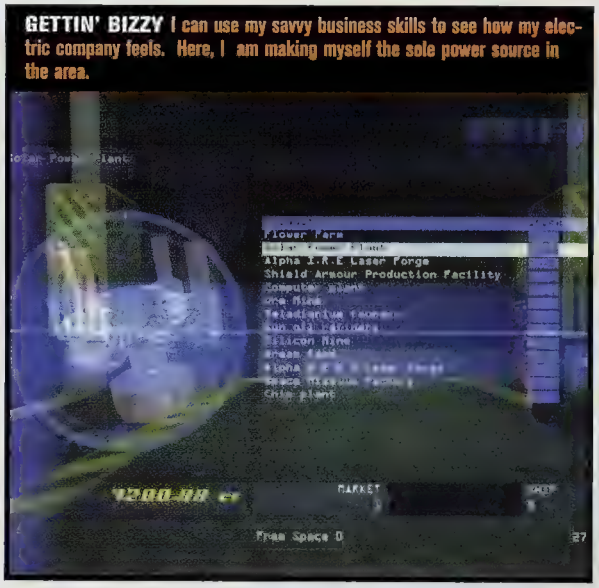
Unintelligible voices are nothing compared to the occasional tests of patience you must endure, especially in the early stages of the game. Until you get a time-compression device, you're in for *long* flights. I've had trade runs where I was able to fix and eat some dinner before I'd arrive at my destination. Even with time compression, you can still make trips that last long enough to microwave some Ramen and stir it around in the bowl.

SHIVER ME EYE PATCH You could either be busting these pirate fools, or joining them. Gotta love free will.

Huge Scope, Limited Reach

X is very much a niche product. While it has a great sense of freedom and adds entrepreneurial gameplay to the space sim trading formula, it's not what most space sim fans are after. Also, you only have one ship chassis, so once you get top-of-the-line equipment for it, well, there's not much else to do. If you fondly remember the ELITE days and don't mind the long flights, slow combat, and don't really care about the established plot, you'll be fine with X. If you want more for your game, you'll probably want to wait for Egosoft's follow-up, X-TENSION. CGW

GETTIN' BIZZY I can use my savvy business skills to see how my electric company feels. Here, I am making myself the sole power source in the area.



CGW RATED

PROS
A modern ELITE, where you can trade, rob, or monopolize your way to wealth and fame.

CONS
You can fly for half-an-hour straight, and absolutely nothing happens.

Requirements: Pentium 200MHz, 32MB RAM, 275MB hard drive space, DirectX-compatible sound and video card. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-II 300MHz, 64MB RAM, 3D card. **3D Support:** Direct3D **Multiplayer Support:** None

Publisher: Southpeak Interactive • **Developer:** Egosoft • **$30** • **www.southpeak.com** • **ESRB Rating:** Teen (13+); mild animated violence, use of drugs.

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Sometimes, Different Is Good.

Castles R Us

Great games have defining moments. In MAJESTY: THE FANTASY KINGDOM SIM, such a moment arrived when one of my stalwart knights decided to single-handedly hold off six elvish archers, a veritable Cincinnatus on the bridge defending my would-be Rome. Although he wielded his broadsword with skill and honor, the elvish arrows were indeed wearing him down. Just like a parking meter on a busy city street, he was ready to expire. Then, one of my healers ran up and began to heal him. Reinvigorated, he began pressing the attack. Then two rangers crept up and began to support my loyal knight by plunking arrows into the elves. Finally, two more knights joined battle and the tides of war turned; the elves were routed and my kingdom saved.

And my mouse and I were idle spectators the entire time.

MAJESTY: THE FANTASY KINGDOM SIM

reviewed by Mark Asher

MAJESTY looks like a real-time strategy game, but plays more like a combination sim/god game. You purchase buildings and hire troops just as you would in a real-time strategy game, but there all similarities end. The 18 hero types you can recruit include warriors, thieves, monks, wizards, healers, paladins, warriors of discord, and rangers. Once recruited, you indirectly influence your units' actions through reward flags rather than giving them explicit commands. Place an attack flag on an enemy or structure, or place an explore flag in a shrouded area and designate a reward. The greater the monetary reward, the greater the interest on the part of your heroes. They will do things on their own – rangers will naturally uncover the map for you since they love to explore – but the reward flags spur them on and guide them.

Cyberlore, the developers, have done an exceedingly clever job of AI programming, making your kingdom's heroes seem like individuals rather than cookie-cutter units popping out of a barracks every 30 seconds. Thieves are greedy and will rob gravestone markers. Mages spend time in libraries researching new spells. You might recruit two knights, and one will be the aforementioned pillar of bravery while the other might behave like Brave Sir Robin from *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, fleeing from all but the easiest battles.

Gameplay in MAJESTY is straightforward. Purchase a building and workers come forward to build it. Many structures, including your castle, can be upgraded. Upgrade a blacksmith's shop and he can make better armor. Upgrade your castle and you get a few more workers, guards, and tax collectors, and the ability to construct new types of buildings. Your tax collectors continually walk about collecting taxes and will periodically deposit the gold in your castle, which you can then spend.

BOUNTY HUNTERS Place reward flags on monsters like this troll, and you'll encourage your heroes to fight them.

DEATH FROM ABOVE Random scenarios offer great replay value, but beware playing them on Expert level – these dragons pounded my fledgling kingdom in minutes.

MAJESTY consists of 19 quests, playable in any order. Some are as simple as "kill the enemy," while others have a time limit and pit you against a rival kingdom in a race to find an artifact. You'll also battle creatures like goblins, vampires, werewolves, and more.

The terrain and starting locations of items, creatures, and kingdoms is randomized every time you start a scenario. Add in multiplayer options, and you have a game with great replay value. (Multiplayer is really fun too. Build your infrastructure and sic your heroes on your opponents via reward flags. Sometimes their own thieves will turn against them to collect the cash!)

There is room for improvement, however. There's usually an early-to-midgame challenge thrown at you. Once you get over this hump, winning is often a foregone conclusion. The game could use an interface tweak or two, also, such as allowing you to adjust the speed of gameplay via the keyboard rather than to drill down through the options menu. Finally, the game cries out for a sandbox mode to allow you to build at your leisure, and to then trigger waves of attackers to test your kingdom's defenses and heroes.

But these are minor quibbles. As a whole, MAJESTY is a fascinating and fun romp that's stuffed full of originality. If I could plant a gamer incentive flag on the store shelves, I would plant it right here. CGW

CGW RATED

PROS

A fresh mix of real-time building and combat in an appealing fantasy setting.

CONS

There's a bit of sameness about many of the scenarios.

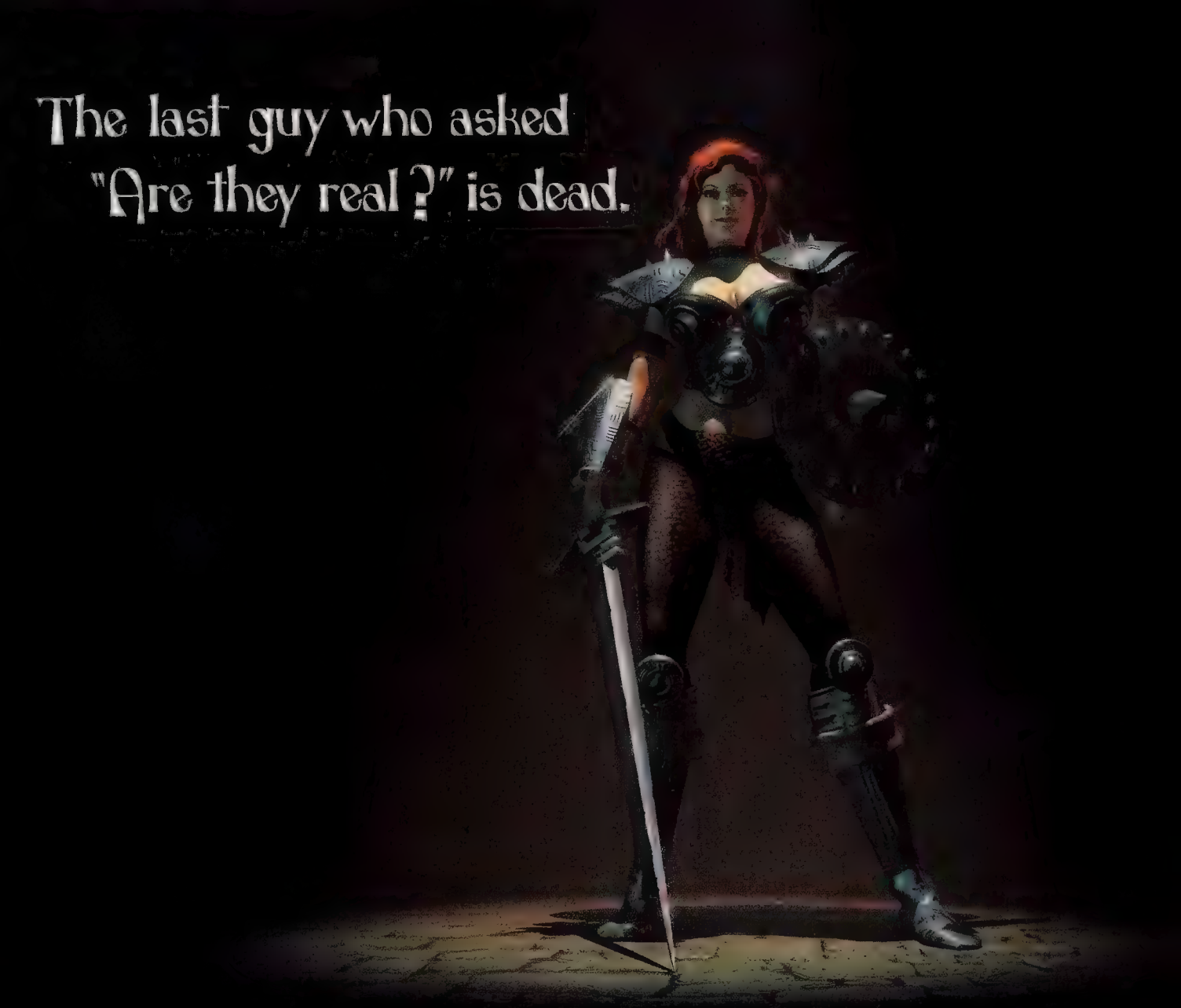
Quest for the Holy Chalice
"Your Majesty's recent illness has taken its toll on the people. Their grief for your suffering only increases with sad news that your condition does not improve. It should now be clear to all that dark magics fuel this insidious ailment.
MAJESTY
CONTINUE
CANCEL

SHORT STORIES Even though the missions are non-linear, all of your mission briefings are set up with little background stories like this.

Requirements: Pentium 166MHz, 32MB RAM, 300MB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium 233MHz, 64MB RAM, 4MB SVGA video.
3D Support: None **Multiplayer Support:** LAN, Internet via The Zone (2-4 players), modem (2 players), one CD per player.

Publisher: Hasbro • **Developer:** Cyberlore Studios • $40 • www.majestyquest.com • **ESRB Rating:** Everyone; animated violence.

The last guy who asked "Are they real?" is dead.



Actually, every guy she's met is dead.

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New Territories, Play Options, and Sexy Graphics Dress Up the Old Warhorse

Risk Redone (Mostly) Right

RISK II
reviewed by Ken Brown

RISK is one of the most popular and revered of all classic boardgames, and the conventional wisdom in bringing a classic to the PC is just this: Don't screw it up. Since 1957, when Parker Brothers decided to publish French movie producer Albert Lamorisse's game, "La Conquete du Monde," there have been tens of millions of people who have played it. That's an awful lot of people who expect to see Kamchatka just as they remember it.

Hasbro, which owns Parker Brothers, understands this. Hasbro's 1997 RISK was successful because it combined the classic game with some innovative new options. They're obviously trying to rediscover that formula with RISK II: Deliver the original game, along with some cool options that add a challenging twist to old Albert's vision. Most designers couldn't foresee real-time 3D in 1957—even the French ones.

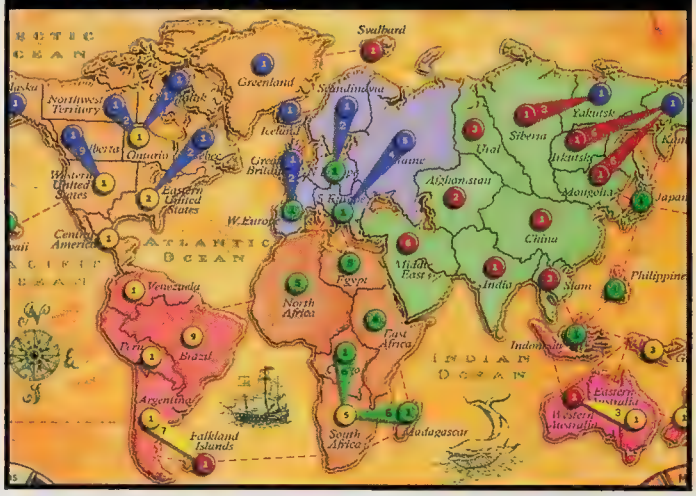
Not surprisingly, RISK II's Classic game couldn't be more authentic if it had wooden pieces and a bundled bayonet. You can play it the same way you used to against up to seven other players, or you can change a few options to make it more interesting. For example, you can add in six new territories, change the values of the continents, or change the card-trading values. You can also change the victory conditions to add variety or to play a faster game. Combine this with some challenging AI and a simple diplomacy module, and you have enough to satisfy the serious RISK fan.

It won't be long, though, before the Classic-fan wades into the new real-time version. Although it uses the same map, this is a very different game. All players place their reinforcements and decide which countries to attack at the same time; players then roll the dice and the computer subtracts losses. In a same-time battle, several players can attack the same territory at once. If the defender loses a mass invasion, all the attackers duke it out to decide who'll take the territory.

The same-time game moves along briskly, but there are problems. Unlike Classic RISK, defenders lose ties, and since attackers still get dice advantages, the same-time game heavily favors attackers. Another problem is that you can't break off an attack if you aren't doing well. Finally, there are limits to the countries you can attack in each turn. Once you've exhausted your primary and optional surge attacks, you can't attack with that territory again.

Despite these shortcomings, RISK II still delivers enough gameplay and play options to satisfy just about anyone. There's a tournament mode in which you can play 14 progessively difficult games to sharpen your strategies. Or you can play single games against 16 tough generaals from history. But the game is still best when exercising your territorial ambitions against your fellow man. CGW

BLAME CANADA The battle scenes are pretty, but they get old after a while.



YOU ATTACKING TO ME? Six optional new territories and more connections add both spice and balance to the game.

DOUBLE YOUR PLEASURE The same-time game supports up to seven attacks at once. Colored spikes and exploding dice show who's on a roll.

CGW RATED

PROS
Faithful recreation of Risk, with several options that enhance the game. Pretty graphics, good AI, smooth network play.

CONS
Repetitive battle scenes. Same-time game favors attackers.

Requirements: Pentium 166MHz, 32MB RAM, 4x CD-ROM drive, 60MB disc space, 2MB SVGA graphics card, DirectX-compatible sound card.
Recommended Requirements: Pentium 233 MMX or better, 64MB RAM, 16x CD-ROM drive, 200MB disc space, 4MB SVGA graphics card. **3D Support:** DirectX
Multiplayer Support: 8 players can hot-seat, LAN or Internet (via the MSN Gaming Zone).

Publisher: Hasbro Interactive • **Developer:** Deep Red • **$40** • **www.risk.com** • **ESRB Rating:** Everyone; animated violence.

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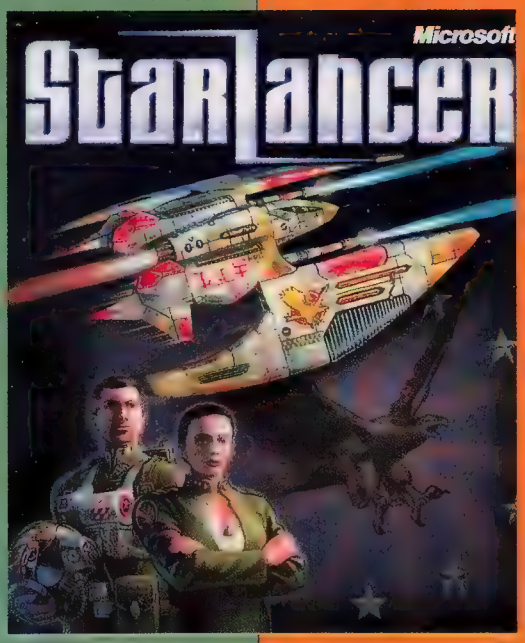

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A Confused Approach Spoils Microsoft's Love for the Game

Whiff!

MICROSOFT BASEBALL 2001 is the anti-HIGH HEAT. Whereas 3DO takes the essence of baseball and translates it in a highly entertaining fashion, Microsoft takes the joys of the game and deadens them completely.

Listen Closely, Grasshopper

The pitcher/batter confrontation is the soul of baseball. The hitter tries to out-think the pitcher in terms of pitch type (fast, slow, or breaking) and location. The pitcher tries to out-think the hitter in much the same way, taking into account the game situation. BASEBALL 2001 sucks the energy out of this duel with the same awkward pitcher/batter interface as last year's version, which works more like a targeting reticule in a flight simulator than anything else.

Here's a typical at-bat: You select your pitch type – a normal, power, or contact swing. Once the pitcher starts his delivery, he spots his pitch location within or outside the strike zone. (When you're playing against the computer, the pitch location is displayed in red once the wind-up begins.) The hitter then must quickly position his crosshairs on top of the pitch location, and swing.

MICROSOFT BASEBALL 2001
reviewed by George Jones

In addition to reducing the number of walks in a game to zero, this completely eliminates all the drama around the most interesting aspect of the game. If my opponent can see exactly where I'm positioning each pitch, three-two and two-strike counts are rendered meaningless. Although a pitcher's control rating does impact how close a pitch comes to its intended location, the variance is tiny enough that as long as you don't try to absolutely paint the corners, you'll be fine.

Even worse, while you are overly focused on lining up your crosshairs on a pitch, you become unable to focus on what kind of pitch is coming in. Not that it matters all that much – the various pitches in this game all seem to look exactly the same, with slightly varying degrees of speed.

To be honest, it's probably more realistic this way. But it's not much fun. And though you can eliminate the pitch cursor, this also eliminates the cursor when you're on the mound – which makes pitching tough.

Essence on a Broader Scale

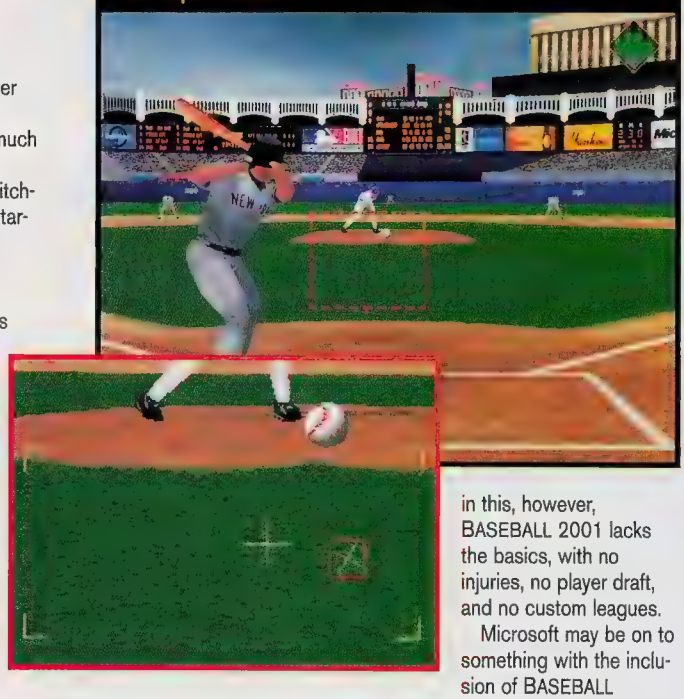
From a broader perspective, the essence of baseball is in the race for the pennant. The 162-game campaign. The hot and cold streaks, injuries, and how you as the manager deal with it all. Even in this, however, BASEBALL 2001 lacks the basics, with no injuries, no player draft, and no custom leagues.

Microsoft may be on to something with the inclusion of BASEBALL MOGUL's league finances. Although you can only manage a few key aspects of the financial game (player salaries, scouting, and farm leagues), it's an intriguing and encouraging feature that Microsoft will hopefully allow to blossom more fully next year.

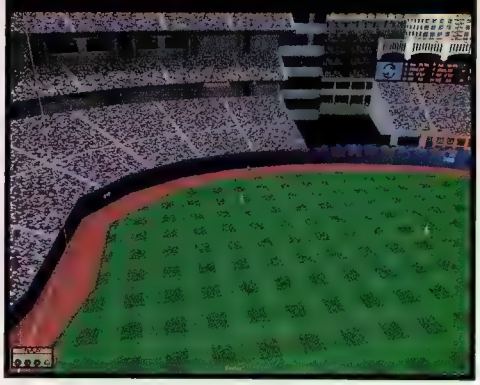
Microsoft certainly isn't trying to go head-to-head with 3DO. It almost seems as if BASEBALL 2001 is intended for a more hardcore player. Unfortunately, elements that hardcore games should have are also missing. The in-game stats are curiously lacking. During an at-bat, the pitcher's numbers (including the all-important pitch count) aren't constantly displayed. In fact, once you select your pitch or swing type, you don't even see the strike count. Also, you can't make line-up or pitching changes before a game starts, unless you do it from the team-roster screens. Worst of all, the game has an alarming number of throwing errors – you can expect to see three to five of these every game – and it's far too easy to get thrown out at second on a single to right field.

The sad reality of MICROSOFT BASEBALL 2001 is that even if you evaluate this game in a vacuum without comparing it to its competition, it's still not worth your money. CGW

BOGEY, SIX O'CLOCK! What would Ted Williams think of the game's awkward pitcher/batter duel, where you try to match up your crosshairs with the pitch location?



TOWERING POP FLIES BASEBALL 2001 has one advantage over the competition: A 3D camera that actually gives you a great sensation of high fly balls. Plus, the game's graphics are phenomenal.



CGW RATED

PROS
Excellent graphics and a true sense of height make this feel like real baseball.

CONS
An awkward pitcher/batter interface and a lack of some basic features clash with the game's hardcore leanings.

Requirements: Pentium 166MHz, 4MB 3D accelerator, or Pentium 200 with 2MB video card for software mode; 32 MB RAM. **Recommended Requirements:** 8 MB 3D accelerator card. **3D Support:** Direct 3D **Multiplayer Support:** None

Publisher: Microsoft • **Developer:** Microsoft • **$30** • www.microsoft.com • **ESRB Rating:** Teen; animated blood and violence.

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EA's Latest Golf Sim Provides a Mix of Fun and Frustration

It's Tiger's World

By having Tiger Woods' face on their latest golf simulation, EA Sports has ensured that even people who think a niblick is a type of canned corn will buy this game. And while there is much to like about this golf sim, some design decisions may frustrate the broad audience to whom the game is marketed.

TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2000

reviewed by Jeff Lackey

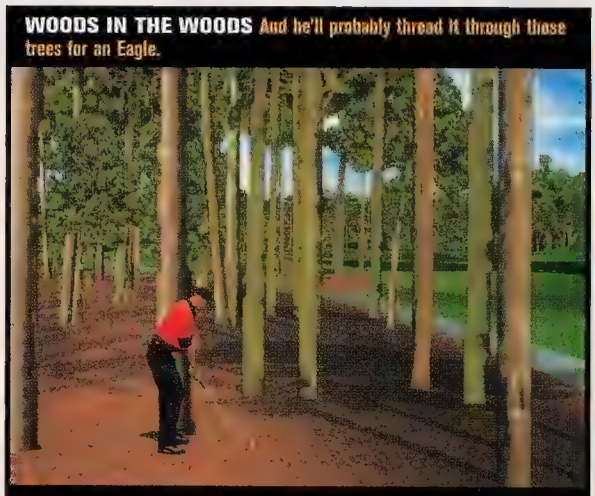
Virtual Birdies and Bogies

While the graphics in TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2000 are nice, they are of the 2D style that has been used for years in the LINKSLS series (and TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2000 looks a lot like LINKSLS). The result is flatter than the 3D-rendered graphics of some newer golf sims, such as in JACK NICKLAUS: GOLDEN BEAR CHALLENGE. Direct3D acceleration is used to display some of the dynamic views, such as the Auto camera, which delivers a very nice television-style presentation. On the down side, the default view will bring the fastest machine to its knees, resulting in very choppy performance.

Ball physics determine whether a golf sim feels like golf, and in TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2000 they are good, with the ball believably rolling, bouncing, and ricocheting off the terrain. The greens are one area in need of a tweak: They're as fast as Augusta after a drought. Sure, some PGA tour greens are fast, but many of these border on the extreme, with missed two-foot putts rolling another 30 feet down a slight slope.

While the number of game modes doesn't equal those of some other golf sims, TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2000 makes up for quantity with its quality. You'll play against nine PGA pros (plus Michael Jordan, although his in-game appearance has very little resemblance to His Airness) in standard competitions such as stroke, match play, skins, fourball, etc., as well as single- and multiple-course tournament options. Play Against The Pros is a very cool option, where you will be able to see PGA pros' shots at selected tournaments and play in a virtual pairing with them. The Internet multiplayer mode worked well, but be aware that you are forced to play on EA's server, as there is no direct Internet support.

Career mode starts you out in the Q school, attempting to earn your Tour card to play a "career" of PGA Tour seasons. This could have been the heart of the game, but for some unfathomable reason you are only allowed to play a career at Pro-level difficulty. And Pro level is extremely difficult, with a swing meter that requires you to hit the snap point at *precisely* the right pixel, with anything else resulting in a shank. It requires the reflexes of a nine-year-old on Red Bull and Ritalin to do this consistently. It's doubtful that the casual gamer will ever make it out of Q school.



WOODS IN THE WOODS And he'll probably thread it through those trees for an Eagle.

DEVILISH ISLAND The famous 17th hole at Sawgrass.

BUILD YOUR OWN The included course architect ensures that you won't get bored playing the same courses.

The Nineteenth Hole

While making your own courses with the included course architect is fun and challenging, the real value of this feature is the wealth of new, free courses that will inevitably show up on the Internet, greatly enhancing the long-term value of the program.

So, what's the final tally? TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2000 has more innovative features than any other golf simulation on the market. However, the casual PC golfer will be frustrated by a number of issues, most notably being forced to play the career mode at the "super-reflexes required" Pro level. CGW

CGW RATED

PROS

Packed with innovative features and a course designer that ensures a flow of free new courses.

CONS

Pro-level swing meter is very difficult, and career-mode demands you play at Pro level; no direct Internet play.

Requirements: Pentium 166 MHz, 32 MB RAM, 100MB hard drive space, 4X CDROM drive. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-III 450 MHz, 128 MB RAM, 600MB hard drive space, D3D accelerator card. **3D Support:** Direct3D **Multiplayer Support:** 2 to 4 players via LAN (IPX/SPX or TCP/IP), 1 to 4 players via Internet (TCP/IP), Electronic Arts' server only.

Publisher: Electronic Arts • **Developer:** Rainbow Studios/EA Sports • **$40** • **www.easports.com** • **ESRB Rating:** Everyone

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KA-52 TEAM ALLIGATOR Provides Chopper Thrills, Russian-Style

Up to Your Eyes in Alligators

There's a visceral thrill in flying a good attack-helicopter simulation, an edge that comes from playing cat and mouse with deadly enemy forces, sneaking up on your target, then popping up from seemingly nowhere to strike. A great chopper sim will recreate that sweaty-palms thrill that will bring you back time and again.

KA-52 TEAM ALLIGATOR is Simis' latest attempt to recreate that feeling in their simulation of Russia's potent new attack helicopter. In Simis style, the emphasis is more on environment and playability than ultra-detailed realism.

KA-52 TEAM ALLIGATOR
reviewed by Jeff Lackey

The Russians Are Coming!

How well a military chopper sim succeeds depends upon a number of factors. One is the graphics: To play that deadly game of hide and seek, you fly low, searching for elevation variations. KA-52 TEAM ALLIGATOR does well in this aspect, providing very nice hills, ridges, and trees for you (and the enemy) to hide behind. The next aspect of the successful chopper sim is the flight physics and avionics modeling. It's an area of differing emphasis to different gamers – some want a flight model that is a precise replication of the aircraft and avionics, down to the screws in the panels. But for the less-hardcore crowd, a flight model that feels like what they think a helicopter should feel like – coupled with readable instruments – gets the job done. Simis chooses the latter approach. The flight model offers detailed physics in some areas, such as retreating blade stall and vortex-ring effects; however, the overall flight model feels a tad too stable with a palpable lack of momentum, such as when the aircraft movement stops precisely when your joystick or rudder-pedal movement stops. Avionics are functional but simplified.

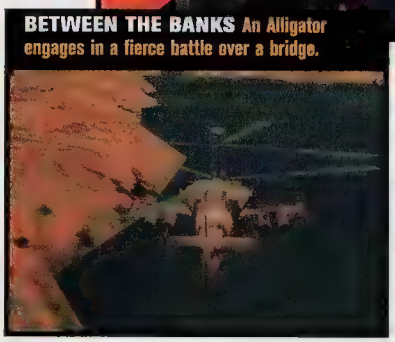
The battlefield environment is key to recreating the atmosphere of helicopter warfare. ALLIGATOR mostly succeeds in this area, with a few shortcomings. Training is facilitated by an excellent tutorial, a set of missions in which you fly with an instructor who teaches you everything you need to know about the Alligator. Combat takes place in "instant action," single missions, and two campaigns of the "scripted branching" variety – one set in a rebellion in Belarus and one in an Afghanistan-like conflict in Tajikistan.

Teamwork, Comrade

Team tactics are critical to modern helicopter warfare, and ALLIGATOR emphasizes the team aspect. You are responsible for your squadron of pilots, boosting their morale (e.g., offering encouragement and "goodies" such as leave and back-pay), selecting who to team with whom in the two-seat Ka-52, and leading search and rescue missions to recover downed pilots.

Wingman commands are plentiful, and wingmen are smart enough to take advantage of cover terrain. A couple of problems, however, do detract from the immersion factor. First, the sound tends to be choppy, making it difficult to understand radio transmissions and, consequently, what's going on across the battlefield. Secondly, although the campaigns are branching, they are made up of a finite number of missions and you can't select which flight to fly in, *a là* LONGBOW 2 or APACHE/HAVOC; thus, things eventually get repetitive. While on the topic of campaigns, there are no enemy or friendly-strength sliders, so the only real way to control the game's difficulty is by choosing the easy (Tajikistan) or difficult (Belarus) campaign.

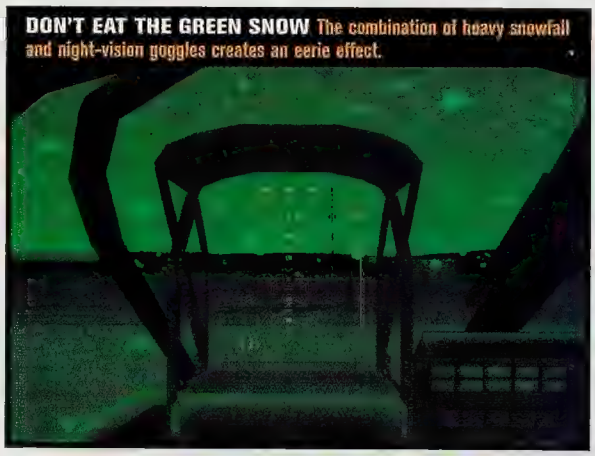
RIGHT SEAT DRIVER The co-pilot/gunner in the KA-52 sits to your right and handles all targeting chores.



BETWEEN THE BANKS An Alligator engages in a fierce battle over a bridge.

Return to Base

How well does it all come together? If you're looking for extremely detailed avionics and flight physics, you may be disappointed. On the other hand, if you're looking for an enjoyable and accessible chopper sim, KA-52 TEAM ALLIGATOR just might be your shot of vodka. CGW



DON'T EAT THE GREEN SNOW The combination of heavy snowfall and night-vision goggles creates an eerie effect.

CGW RATED

PROS
Quality graphics; team-management aspects provide a better-than-average battlefield environment.

CONS
The branching campaign becomes repetitive; sound problems interfere with complete immersion.

Requirements: Windows 95/98, Pentium 200 MHz, 32 MB RAM, 3D-accelerator card with 4+ MB RAM. **Recommended Requirements:** Same
3D Support: Direct3D **Multiplayer Support:** 6 players (co-op); 8 players (head to head) via Internet, IPX, modem, or serial.

Publisher: GT Interactive • **Developer:** Simis • $35 • www.ka52.com • **ESRB Rating:** RP (rating pending at press time)

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EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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www.indyracing2000.com

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FIGHTER ACE 2 Has a Little Something for Just About Everyone

Who Do You Want To Shoot Down Today?

It's often been said that if you give Microsoft enough time, they'll not only get something right, but dominate the market in question as well. So in typical Microsoft-product fashion, FIGHTER ACE 2 (FA2) is a much improved follow-up to a fairly inadequate predecessor. And while it still isn't the answer to everyone's online dreams, what it does offer for only ten bucks a month can't be ignored.

Many of the improvements and features new to FIGHTER ACE 2 are quite substantial over version 1.5, but most of these offerings merely play catch-up with the competition. Field-capture, 3D-acceleration, and advanced physics models have been added – but all were found elsewhere first. Furthermore, the new graphics on display in FA2 are a stark contradiction in quality. The visual look of the terrain is by far the best of any online sim out there, but the mountains melt away *a là* JANE'S F-15. In addition, the plane exteriors and cockpits can only be described as muddy and dull. The new damage modeling found in the advanced arenas, however, is quite competitive: Based on where you've taken hits, your plane's performance is going to suffer accordingly – and it's quite convincing.

MICROSOFT'S FIGHTER ACE 2

reviewed By Gordon Berg

The "advanced" flight model itself is probably the biggest disappointment. Although leaps and bounds ahead of the previous hardcore setting, the new realism levels alone for FA2 won't make converts out of current WARBIRDS or ACES HIGH pilots. The manner in which the planes depart from flight is way too violent and quirky, and it's clear that FA2's implementation of how these classic warplanes should behave could use some more refinement. You might think such criticism is nitpicky, but like I said, better can be found elsewhere.

The Challenge of Realism Lite

If the staggering number of pilots who prefer flying in the "arcade-mode" arenas is any indicator, the majority of FA2's current customer base could apparently give a rat's ass about the newly-offered advanced physics. It might be tempting to think these arenas are in fact easy, but nothing could be further from the truth. During my arcade-mode airtime, I failed to achieve a single kill, while constantly getting shot down myself in the process (I did better in full-realism). Flying the planes couldn't have been easier, but staying on the six of a good arcade-mode pilot was a different matter entirely – those guys were amazing.

CGW RATED

PROS

Varied gameplay options; extremely competitive pricing model.

CONS

Advanced flight model could be better; lackluster plane graphics.

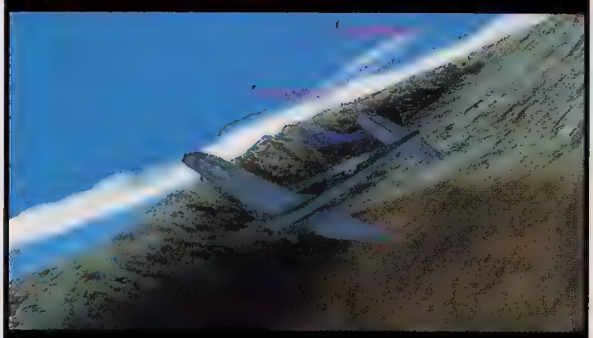
Turf Wars

As it stands right now, the gameplay offered in FA2's territorial-combat arena is the most compelling of all the current online sims, and will probably remain so until WW2 ONLINE makes its debut later this year. Defense and conquest of resources play a vital role, and plenty of AI-controlled units means you can still have a good time when fewer players are logged in to Microsoft's Zone.com. But FA2's best feature has got to be the private arenas you can establish and host on their servers. Up to 64 players can join the session you've created, and you can set up your arena however you wish. Developer VR-1 plans to add that same level of configurability to their special events as well, giving customers the option to establish 300 player-max scenarios, such as a hypothetical "Patton vs. the Russians" encounter.

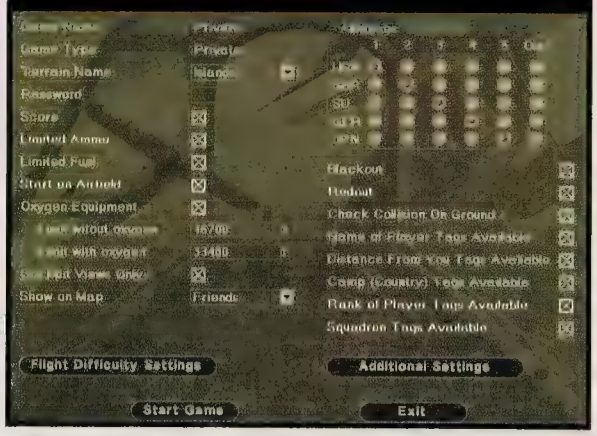
Understandably, it's sometimes the price of an online sim that becomes the most critical factor, and it's awfully hard to argue with $10/month. For the time being, those with more discerning tastes and fatter wallets still might want to look elsewhere. But give Microsoft enough time, and who knows? CGW

HOT SEAT This P-51 pilot's temperature is rising. Time to hit the silk, before he's roasted.

THE HILLS ARE ALIVE This Corsair pilot gets a brief respite between melees to savor FA2's well-rendered terrain.



ARE YOU BEING SERVED? The ability to host private arenas with a ton of tweaks is one of FA2's strong points.



Requirements: Pentium 200 MMX w/64 MB RAM, or Pentium 266 w/32 MB RAM. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-II 450, 128MB RAM, 3D accelerator.
3D Support: Direct3D, Glide **Multiplayer Support:** Internet

Publisher: Microsoft • Developer: VR-1 • $9.99/month • www.zone.com/fighterace
ESRB Rating: Everyone

Tom Clancy's

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Red Storm ENTERTAINMENT

SHADOW WATCH's Sloooow Combat System Says R.I.P.

Do Looks Kill?

What...is...it...like...to...play...SHADOW...WATCH? What...is...combat...like? How...can...one...simple...computer...game...make...time...stand...ab...so...lute...ly....still? You'd have to be a gamer obsessed with micromanaging painstakingly methodical movement/action points – or a Tom Clancy stalker – to sit through the mind-numbing combat of SHADOW WATCH. Most gamers will just go nuts.

The gameplay in SHADOW WATCH combines the turn-based squad combat of X-COM and JAGGED ALLIANCE with a shallower version of those games' RPG-ish character development. Based on Tom Clancy's book by the same name, the game puts you in command of a spec-ops team in charge of protecting a new space station being built by a multi-national organization, and threatened by a variety of evil syndicates. The game is all rolled up into a vibrant, appealingly colorful comic book motif that doesn't require a whole lot of processor speed to drive it.

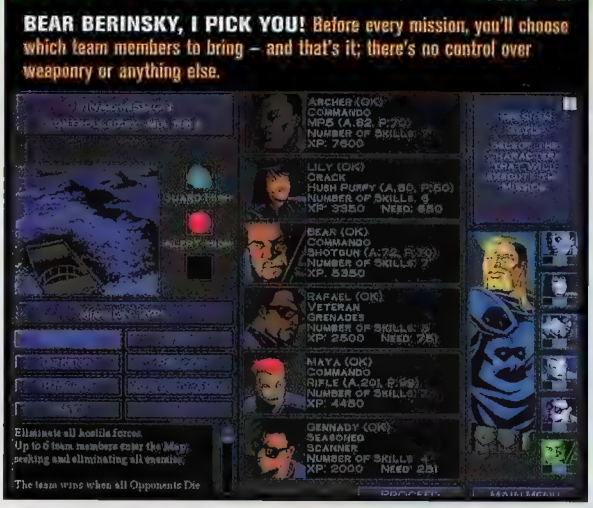
SHADOW WATCH
reviewed by Raphael Liberatore

The game begins like a typical Clancy thriller with your team dispatched to either Rio de Janeiro, Hong Kong, or Baikonur. Wherever you go, your team investigates suspicious activity. This usually means clicking around an overlay map while chatting or interrogating NPCs, and trying to piece together who is attempting to sabotage the space station. Depending on your responses, each meeting opens up one or two more missions, invariably leading you to question more people, and so on. With more than 140 different variations on 18 different maps in three separate sections, you'll never repeat the same scenario twice.

Your team members develop and refine their specific skills as the game progresses, adding new ones from a predetermined skill tree. The diverse characters are interesting enough for good storyboarding: There's Maya, the Sniper who can heal; Lily, the Martial Artist who does a mean side kick; and Bear, the brawny shotgun-toting commando who will always go ballistic. But unlike X-COM, SHADOW WATCH lacks flexibility in its character development. Sure, as Rafael's demolitions skill increases he'll toss better and more useful grenades, but he'll never be able to learn martial arts or weapon skills – which excludes him from most enemy surprise attacks, or close-quarter scrapes where everyone's going toe to toe with the enemy. Even more rigidly, when a character dies, you must restart the mission all over again with no questions asked. There is no cannon fodder to grease your commandos' wheels.

Even though SHADOW WATCH offers replayability up the wazoo with its randomized missions, things bog down fatally when your team finally gets into the heart and soul of the game, its very dull and tedious combat system. The Moral-Action Point Initiative System (MAPI) is quite opaque, especially when allocating combat points. Rather than highlighting your character and clicking to move and attack, SHADOW WATCH requires that you choose posture, movement, and action commands from a side menu. Even though the maps are nicely condensed for quick segues into combat, stuff like fire and movement, planting explosives, or opening doors stifles the combat flow enough to suggest a Kasparov vs. Deep Blue chess tournament.

KARTOON KILLERS Effective comic-style art is nice, but it can't save a dreadfully tedious combat model.



BEAR BERINSKY, I PICK YOU! Before every mission, you'll choose which team members to bring – and that's it; there's no control over weaponry or anything else.

Morale is the other chief annoyance of the combat model. It seems that anytime someone on your team gets shot, they tend to go berserk, act stupid, or flee. This is a problem, as when the enemy takes hits, they always seem to get mad and come charging right at you – rather than running away or acting stupid.

All in all, SHADOW WATCH's hog-tied combat and limited character development stifle what could have been a decent game. Its compelling storyline, intriguing characters, dynamic missions, and color and sound put this game a 1/2 step ahead of ODIUM and ABOMINATION...but that ain't saying much. Dig out your old copy of X-COM, or take JAGGED ALLIANCE 2 for another spin, and be glad you didn't fall victim to this nice-looking-but-incredibly-slow strategy game. CGW

CGW RATED

PROS
The comic book graphics look pretty cool.

CONS
Tedious combat system turns game into a color-saturated bog.

Requirements: Pentium 133 MMX, 32MB RAM, 200MB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium II, 64MB RAM. **3D Support:** None
Multiplayer Support: None

Publisher: Red Storm Entertainment • $40 • www.redstorm.com • **ESRB Rating:** Teen; animated violence.

Submarine TITANS

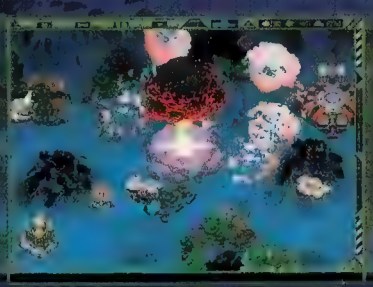
250 Million Years Ago,
Man Evolved Out of the Ocean.

This Year, He Goes Back!

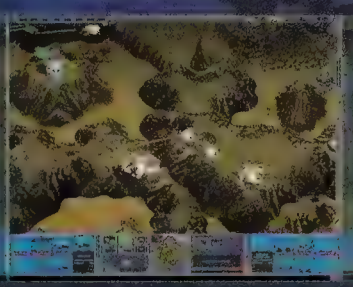
In the year 2047, a massive comet ravages Earth's surface and the remnants of mankind descend to the bottom of the ocean in order to survive.
A hundred years pass, but even in the still of the deep, one truth remains—where man goes, war will follow. Now the cradle of creation has spawned the seeds of man's destruction and all the oceans of the world are not big enough for three civilizations locked in a fierce battle for man's final frontier.

Coming Summer 2000

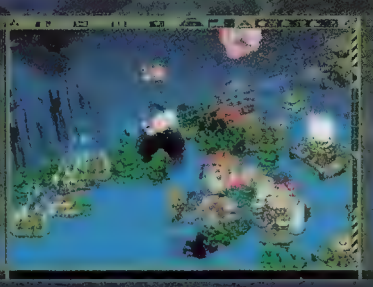
Three distinct civilizations to play - two human, one alien.



Fully realized 3D underwater universe including 5 depth/elevation levels.



Includes a powerful scenario editor and an intelligent random mission generator .



Multiplayer action over Internet or LAN allows up to 24 players.

Real-Time Strategy

Strategy First
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GT Interactive Software

RP

Windows® 95/98
PC CD-ROM

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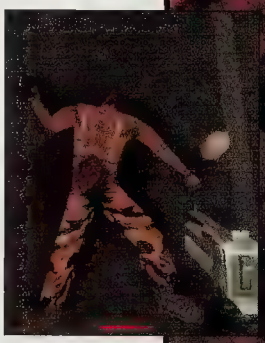
This shooter's whole is far less than the sum of its (copious) severed body parts.

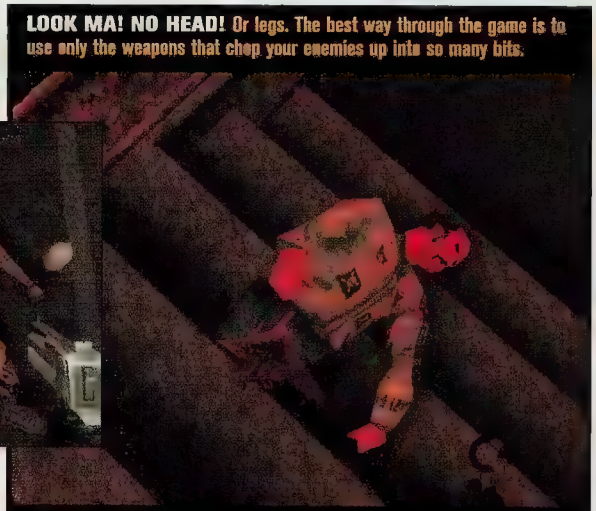
Shoot To Kill...and Maim...and Disfigure

There are about thirteen different versions of this review cluttering my Recycle Bin right now. Reviews where I struggled to put SOLDIER OF FORTUNE into some sort of context, to discuss the merits and use of concepts like provocation, outrage, and violence in art and entertainment. Reviews where I framed my arguments with references to (I swear to God) Nabokov, that elephant-feces Virgin Mary portrait that pissed off Rudy Guiliani, and "The Proper Way to Display an American Flag." But the more I tried to tackle bold-face all-caps **BIGGER ISSUES,** the more I realized this game just wasn't worth the effort.

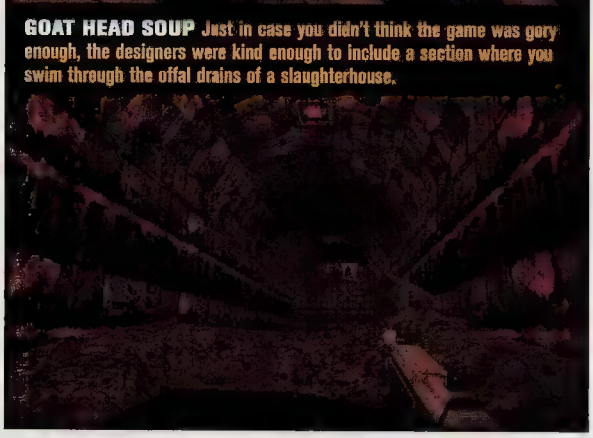
The bottom line is this: SOLDIER OF FORTUNE is a stupid game. A mean-spirited, cynical, demeaning game unworthy of your time, your money, or any of the public outrage-induced publicity it's counting on.

SOLDIER OF FORTUNE
reviewed by Robert Coffey





LOOK MA! NO HEAD! Or legs. The best way through the game is to use only the weapons that chop your enemies up into so many bits.



GOAT HEAD SOUP Just in case you didn't think the game was gory enough, the designers were kind enough to include a section where you swim through the offal drains of a slaughterhouse.

Banking on Blood

If you haven't heard, SOLDIER OF FORTUNE (SOF) is one violent piece of software. Heads explode like blood-filled balloons, limbs are routinely shredded off, guts hang out of bullet-torn abdomens – you can practically taste the shattered bits of skull and brain matter. SOF, claims Raven Software, models realistic ballistic damage like no other game before it.

I don't know about that, but I do know this: It's unnecessary, it's gratuitous, and it offends a big fat freedom-of-speech zealot like me. It's not the level of violence that's disturbing; it's the fact that the game seems to take an almost gleeful delight in encouraging you not only to defeat your enemies, but to systematically butcher them. You've got a nice big arsenal to choose from, yet you'll find yourself eschewing the various ineffective submachine guns at your disposal in favor of the heavy machine gun or Silver Talon handgun, both of which are capable of ripping an enemy's limb off with one shot, thus killing him. The game absolutely revels in inflicting misery.

The realism factor is further revealed as a disingenuous sham by the "stealth meter," a graphic representation of how quietly you're moving through the world. The game is constructed in such a way that stealth is not a factor. Your job is to kill everyone in sight as quickly and bloodily as possible. Crap AI further hammers this home, since you can set off bombs in one room, open a door, and snipe the oblivious guards in the next as long as you aren't spotted visually.

Doing Unto the Others

No one has made a shooter with babies for bad guys, for the simple reason that most people would understandably balk at killing babies. Bad guys in entertainment have to be asking for it; they have to be different than you; you can't feel anything for them. Movies do this by rarely showing the faces of the legions being killed, games do it by making the enemies aliens, demons, cultists, or something equally farfetched. SOF does it by letting you slay lots of people of color, primarily Arabs or Asians.

Yes, there are other – *white* – enemies to kill, but snowsuit hoods, protective masks, ludicrous tattoos, and heavy sunglasses obscure their faces. The few white faces you actually *see* so stereotypically scream EVIL, you can shoot them without compunction. Not so for the hundreds of non-white bad guys you slaughter – the colored faces of Iraqis and Japanese are apparently inhuman enough that it's okay to shoot both their legs off their body before their blood-spurting torso hits the ground.

But maybe you find all this to be so much tree-hugging, vegetarian, left-wing crap. Fine. Click on the violence lock and play the game, and you'll discover this: As a shooter, SOF is just an adequate product. It tries to recreate an action-movie feel and occasionally succeeds, such as when you have to hold off waves of terrorists while your sidekick defuses a bomb. The vast majority of this game is an unrewarding, rote shooter that even moderately-experienced players will finish in 20 hours or less. Remove the savagery from the game and there's nothing there. No story to hold you, nothing exciting or fresh in the action to rivet you, no real reason to stop playing UNREAL TOURNAMENT to make time for this – unless the opportunity to shoot villains in the balls and watch them bleed out is appealing to you. CGW

CGW RATED

PROS
At times, you'll feel like you're starring in a big budget, over-the-top action flick.

CONS
The spirit and substance of the game are just as insulting, empty, and unrewarding as any bad action flick.

Requirements: Pentium 233, 64MB RAM, 800MB hard drive space, 3D accelerator. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium II, 128MB RAM.
3D Support: OpenGL **Multiplayer Support:** Up to 32 players via LAN or Internet; one CD per player.

Publisher: Activision • Developer: Raven Software • $50 • www.activision.com • ESRB Rating: Mature; animated blood and gore, animated violence.

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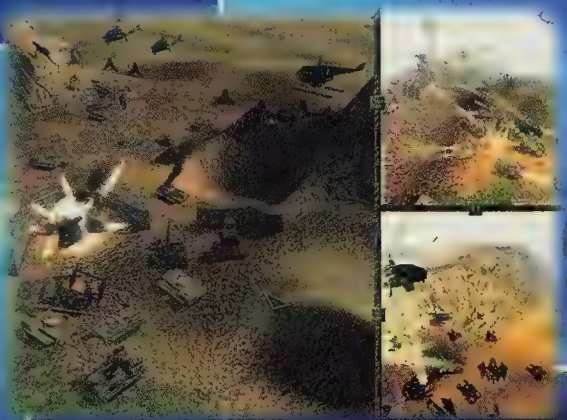

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QUICK HITS

ROGUE SPEAR MISSION PACK: URBAN OPERATIONS

Red Storm Entertainment just became the king of tactical simulation developers. I just finished playing the ROGUE SPEAR expansion pack, URBAN OPERATIONS, and I'm already itching to rejoin my Rainbow-team comrades. It's that addictive, and it's all because URBAN OPERATIONS is loaded with everything imaginable for armchair counter-terrorists.

Here's the SITREP: First off, ROGUE SPEAR gets patched to 2.05 for more stability and improved performance. I played the entire URBAN OPERATIONS campaign without a hiccup – the way games should be played. Second, URBAN OPERATIONS tweaks some of ROGUE SPEAR's interface, making it even more user-friendly, especially in multiplayer and mission-planning screens, which are much easier to set-up. Add five new missions, all beautifully rendered in real-world locations like Istanbul, Mexico City, Hong Kong, London, and Venice. Mix in a few spruced-up RAINBOW SIX missions, along with the entire collection of previous ROGUE SPEAR missions, and you've got a game that will last as long as there are tangos to eliminate.

★★★★½

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD EDITORS' CHOICE

Next, Red Storm adds a few light machine guns like the SAW M249, HK21E3, RPD, and another sniper rifle – the silenced AWS – to an already outstanding counter-terrorist arsenal. But wait, there's more. Multiplayer games possess more game-type options like assault and defend and recon. Last but not least, the designers finally gave fans a custom editor for tweaking maps. Wow.

The game's missions are extremely challenging from start to finish, with little room for error. Terrorists now possess beefed-up skills like sniping, fire and movement, and running for cover. Some are even well-armored. Sometimes, it's hard to tell a hostage or bystander from a foe, so you have to be on your toes. In operation Infinite Seven, for example, standard room-clearing will flush Marxist guerrillas out of their stronghold and spill them into the streets of Mexico, making for a series of tense urban firefights.

All in all, URBAN OPERATIONS is the best expansion I've ever played – tactical sim or otherwise. *–Raphael Liberatore*

Genre: Tactical Simulation • **Publisher:** Red Storm Entertainment • $30 • www.redstorm.com
ESRB Rating: Mature; animated blood and gore, animated violence.

ARCOMAGE

Genre: Puzzles/Classics • **Publisher:** 3DO • **Developer:** New World Computing • $13 • www.3do.com • **ESRB Rating:** Everyone

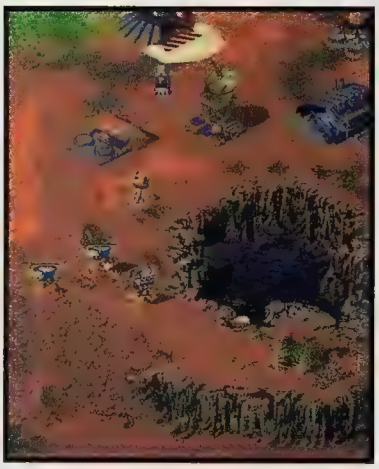
One of the best things about MIGHT AND MAGIC VII was an addictive *Magic: The Gathering*-style card game called *Arcomage*. Built into the game as a quest, *Arcomage* developed a cult following and gamers clamored for its release as a separate game. Unfortunately, that's what has happened.

★★

What we have here is basically the exact same card game, ripped out of the RPG with virtually nothing added or changed. Yes, you can play it with another player now (over a network or via Mplayer), but this is a lot less fun than you'd think. The problem is the utter randomness of the cards – which seems less noticeable when you're mindlessly playing this game by

yourself, like Solitaire. After a few games with another person, you'll long for the ability to assemble your own deck, or modify the rules, or *anything* to deepen the gameplay.

You can change the starting and victory conditions, but that's not enough to recommend this to anyone who owns MMVII or MMVIII – the only real audience for this title. One huge caveat: You must download ARCOMAGE from 3DO's Web site, but it's *machine specific* – you can't transfer the game to another PC. If you want to play on your laptop, be sure you download it directly onto the laptop. But my advice would be to just stick with Solitaire. *–Jeff Green*



COMMAND & CONQUER: TIBERIAN SUN - FIRESTORM

Genre: Strategy • **Publisher:** Westwood Studios • $25 • www.westwood.com • **ESRB Rating:** Teen; mild language, realistic blood and violence.

COMMAND & CONQUER: TIBERIAN SUN was a decent real-time strategy game, if a bit unbalanced. Westwood's FIRESTORM add-on does little to change that.

In TIBERIAN SUN, the Brotherhood of Nod had significant advantages over the GDI side. Nods' cloaking and burrowing units and their dreaded Chemical Missiles were far too powerful. Westwood attempts to correct this imbalance in FIRESTORM with some welcome additions to the GDI arsenal. Juggernauts, for example, are huge walking artillery pieces, while the Elite Infantry Drop Pod is a useful new component for the Upgrade Center that allows the GDI to perform sneak attacks of their own – although not as effectively as the Nod. Additionally, other units – like the Jump Jet infantry – have been upgraded to detect cloaked units.

★★★

The Nod get a new unit called the Reaper that functions like a Cyborg on spider legs, and both sides can build Mobile War Factories and Limpet Drones, a type of tracker mine. The balancing still isn't complete, but at least now, choosing the GDI on a multiplayer map becomes a less risky move. FIRESTORM also features 18 fairly-difficult new single-player missions to play through, and an enhanced map editor for multiplayer games.

Despite all this, FIRESTORM is pretty average as far as expansion packs go. The new units are nice, but you'll want more – more play-balancing, more units, and more of the fun that seemed to be missing from last year's TIBERIAN SUN. If you were disappointed by TIBERIAN SUN, FIRESTORM won't turn it around for you, but if you're a C&C completist, you'll want to pick this one up. *–Tom Price*

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Dragon Raja Online

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Fidex

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INVICTUS

Set in the universe of Greco-Roman mythology, INVICTUS is a real-time strategy game in the MYTH vein: no research or resource gathering, just kickin' ass across a true 3D world which you can spin, tilt, and pan.

Charged with saving humanity from Poseidon's wrath, you assemble war parties made up of soldiers, mythical beasts, and mythic heroes such as Hercules, Hippolyta, and Perseus. Heroes have special powers: Perseus turns enemies to stone while Hercules triggers earthquakes with blows from his mighty club. Sound cool? Sorry. INVICTUS is most noteworthy for its failure to entertain, despite the great concept.

★½

For starters, poor color-palette choices often ruin the gameplay. When you can't tell Hercules from a skeleton, or pick out the giant spider in the midst of battle, then there's a problem.

Next, foes are unbelievably strong. Average soldiers can endure astounding beatings: 50 or 60 cuts with a battle ax, dozens of arrows, or a hundred sword strikes. Hercules' club provokes earthquakes, but has trouble dispatching lowly archers. So, if six swordsmen attack six swordsmen...go make a sandwich.

INVICTUS' formations are nearly worthless, its humor frequently annoying, the AI mediocre, the missions frustrating and uninspired. Even multiplayer fails to lift this game from the mud.

It just ain't fun. –*Mark Clarkson*

Genre: Strategy • **Publisher:** Interplay • **Developer:** Quicksilver Software
$50 • www.interplay.com • **ESRB Rating:** Teen; animated blood and violence.

SAMMY SOSA SOFTBALL SLAM

Genre: Sports • **Publisher:** 3DO • $20 • www.3do.com • **ESRB Rating:** Everyone

Take this statement to the bank: No PC softball game has been or ever will be as realistic as Sammy Sosa's. I feel fairly safe saying this, since there probably won't be another softball game released. In fact, 3DO's slow-pitch HIGH HEAT mod can be a painful reminder of real life, with outfielders who can't catch, and hitters who can knock the hide off the ball but barely waddle to first base.

The game does have its charms. The graphics are great, and you can also modify the players and create new male, female, or coed teams. Parents will appreciate the light-hearted nature of the game, and the ability to automate everything but hitting and pitching the ball. In a feature that several *CGW* editors could use in our annual HIGH HEAT league, the ball flashes red to signify when to swing. Unfortunately, the Monster Truck-style announcer becomes annoying in record time, and there's no league play – just four- and eight-team tournaments.

★★½

But here's the big problem. We play softball because we can't play baseball. So, given our PC-sports fantasy druthers, we'll bypass this in favor of a baseball sim. But if you have kids or are interested in a less serious sports game, SAMMY SOSA won't do you wrong. –*George Jones*

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CAVEAT GAMER: A LOT OF GAMES WON'T RUN IN WINDOWS 2000

Gated Community

by Loyd Case

As someone who has labored constantly to keep Windows 98 running happily, I was keenly looking forward to Windows 2000 Professional. Here was a stable operating system that could support multiple CPUs and would actually ship with DirectX 7.0a. However, Microsoft was managing expectations early on that it might not be a boon for gamers—and they were correct.

Windows 9x games, as it turns out, are not all written purely "above the hardware." Many do touch the hardware in parts of the game, whether it's the graphics card, the sound card, the game controller, or input devices like the keyboard. Microsoft estimates that 40–50 percent of the 800 best-selling PC games that shipped since Windows 95 simply won't run. Based on my experience, that number seems about right.

PROS
Stable; cool interface; easy installation.

CONS
Many Windows 9x games simply don't run.

Requirements
- Pentium 266 or better, 128MB RAM.
- $119 upgrade; $189 full install (Windows 2000 Professional)

www.microsoft.com

Setup and Go

There are two options for installing Windows 2000: Upgrade the existing version of Windows, or install separately. You get a stern warning that installing separately (i.e., creating a dual-boot environment) means that you'll have to reinstall your applications. I tried both methods. While the upgrade method worked surprisingly well, I strongly recommend you set up a dual-boot system. That way, you can always boot into Windows 98 for those games that don't work—and there are plenty of them. Also, you'll have to track down proper drivers. We used a Sound Blaster Live sound card and GeForce 256 DDR 3D accelerator. DirectSound drivers for the Sound Blaster ship with Windows 2000, but you only get stereo (no four-channel support yet). However, I did have to download GeForce Windows 2000 drivers from the nVidia Web site.

There are a lot of reasons to like Windows 2000, but game compatibility isn't one of them.

Windows 2000 will look familiar to Windows users, but there are interesting differences. For example, in office applications, all preferences are stored in the "\documents and settings\USER NAME" folder. There are other differences that may seem quirky at first, but are the result of running a protected operating system. One thing you will want to do is set the preferred boot system if you're dual-booting.

Let the Games Begin

We ran a boatload of games—28 in all—through Windows 2000 with some interesting results, as we'll see in a moment. However, let's talk performance for a moment. The nVidia drivers didn't give us a way to disable v-sync, so we won't publish 3D GameGauge scores here.

GADGET OF THE MONTH

No sooner do mice lose their balls and tails than someone invents a reason to festoon them with appendages anew. The "Comfy Mouse," a set of sponge-rubber discs that are affixed to your mouse buttons, are designed to help alleviate the discomfort of mousing for users who have carpal tunnel syndrome or some other repetitive strain injury. Does it work? We have no idea. We just thought we had to share one of the oddest products we've seen in recent memory.

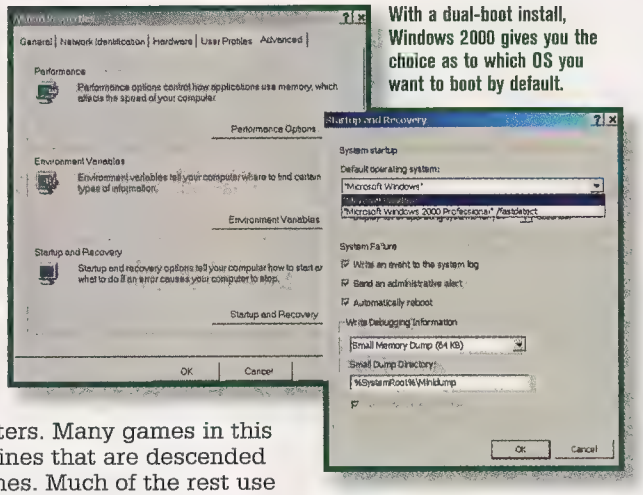
Hardy Innovations • $5 for a set of 5 • www.hardyinnovations.com

Test Results

The Windows 2000 3D-card drivers we tested with didn't let us turn v-sync off on Direct3D, so it wasn't possible to gather an accurate 3D GameGauge score. But we can still get accurate 3D WinBench 2000 results in this environment, and as you can see, Windows 98SE is about 13 percent faster in Direct3D performance. Thankfully, OpenGL turns v-sync off by default, so we took a look at QUAKE III at multiple resolutions. Windows 2000 and its 3D card driver have some maturing to do in terms of game performance. Our test system was a Pentium-III 800MHz running on Intel's 820 chipset, with a GeForce DDR-based 3D card, Vortex2-based sound card, and EIDE storage components.

	WINDOWS 2000	WINDOWS 98SE
QUAKE III (1024x768x16)	49.9	80.8
QUAKE III (1024x768x32)	40.7	52.7
QUAKE III (1600x1200x32)	11.2	13.5
Content Creation WinStone (1280x1024x32, tests 2D-graphics performance)	30.6	29
3D WinBench 2000 (1024x768x32)	60.3	68.7
3D WinBench 2000 Processor Tests	1.39	1.59

However, 3D WinBench 2000 and OpenGL games both run with VSYNC disabled by default. 3D WinBench 2000 posted a somewhat lower score under Windows 2000 than in Windows 98SE. Similarly, QUAKE III ARENA posted lower scores. It seems that you do pay a bit of a performance penalty for that added safety. Also appreciate that nVidia's drivers will probably get a bit faster with subsequent versions. Of course, it's also possible that part of the problem lies in the operating system requirements. Windows 2000 uses more RAM than Windows 98, and our test-bed had a "mere" 128MB of RDRAM.



THE CHOICE IS YOURS: With a dual-boot install, Windows 2000 gives you the choice as to which OS you want to boot by default.

First-Person Shooters

The best news is for fans of first-person shooters. Many games in this genre are built with engines that are descended from various QUAKE games. Much of the rest use the UNREAL engine. I briefly ran QUAKE III ARENA, QUAKE II, UNREAL TOURNAMENT, and HALF-LIFE through the *CGW* test-bed, and all ran without a hitch. They did run somewhat slower, and it wasn't just because v-sync couldn't be disabled. But run they did. The one exception was ROGUE SPEAR, which refused to run at all. So for the most part, action gaming fans are in good shape.

Strategy Games

The majority of strategy games seem to run without a hitch. Even HOMEWORLD—which makes heavy use of 3D-accelerated visual effects—was quite happy running under Direct3D. However, HOMEWORLD didn't like OpenGL for some reason. The other strategy games also ran quite well, ranging from the glitz of TIBERIAN SUN to the somewhat more prosaic graphics in AGE OF WONDERS.

Simulations Fear It

Sims seemed to be split evenly in the run/don't-run camps. FALCON 4.0, FREESPACE 2, FLIGHT SIMULATOR, RE*VOLT, PANZER ELITE, and NASCAR RACING III ran fine. JANE'S USAF, JANE'S F/A-18, MIG ALLEY, and WINGS OF GLORY didn't. We could run JANE'S USAF, but only at the default settings; the program would lock up when you tried to access the preferences screen. Some refused to install, while others simply tanked. So the bottom line is this: If you're a sim flyer or driver, Windows 2000 is at best an iffy proposition.

And a Few More

I only ran two sports titles, HIGH HEAT BASEBALL 2000 and MICROSOFT'S NFL FEVER 2000, and neither worked. PLANESCAPE: TORMENT ran fine, which indicates that all the games that use the BALDUR'S GATE Infinity engine should run without a hitch. TOMB RAIDER IV refused to run, as did BATTLEZONE II.

Bottom Line

Should you get Windows 2000? I've been using it as my primary OS since it was released, and there's a lot to like about it. I've had far fewer problems with Internet Explorer, for example. But games are definitely a mixed bag. Of the 28 games I ran on it, two-thirds of them ran, though a few had trouble, and the remaining third were D.O.A. Still, as game developers look to the future, the folks in Redmond are strongly encouraging them to develop and test under Windows 2000. So, while many current and older titles may not run, we can hope that future ones will. CGW

Control Issues

My trusty old CH F16 Combatstick with rudder pedals worked fine in Windows 2000. I also plugged in a Logitech Wingman Extreme Digital. The Wingman stick works either as a stock DirectInput device, or you can use Logitech's custom software. I simply plugged the Wingman into a free USB port; it was auto-detected and configured into the game controller control panel. After a few calibration steps, I was off and running. This is really good news, though I'd caution against installing custom software if you can avoid it. Ironically, Microsoft's Sidewinder controllers that require custom drivers won't work. One tidbit: You must have administrator privileges to configure and set up a game controller.

Under the Hood

BY LOYD CASE

You Are Not Alone

When Home LANs and the Internet Collide

One good thing leads to another. So what happens when you have an ultimate gaming machine of your own? You get a second one, of course. Once you do, the temptation to network them together becomes nearly impossible to resist.

Soon, you and your buddies (or spouse or children) are happily gaming. Then, you and your crew will inevitably want to play with other people on the Internet. Now, things start to get complicated. Despite mastering the art of the local-area network, you find that connecting multiple players from your home LAN to the Internet is seemingly impossible.

Well, it's not, and there are actually several ways to do it.

A Singular Problem

So how do you connect your other PCs to the Internet?

The easiest way is to use Internet connection sharing software, where you can—with a fairly fast connection and a single-user account—allow PCs on your internal-only LAN to share your Internet connection. But the main problem here is that you only have one IP address the Internet can "see" (see image). For simple Web surfing or sending email, this approach works fine, but many game servers expect each client to have its own IP address. So only the first person who tries to connect to the game server will be able to play.

Here's the problem: When most people set up a home LAN, they use internal-only (also called private) IP addresses, like 192.168.0.XXX, where XXX ranges from 1 to 255. When you get your cable or DSL modem, your ISP usually assigns one dedicated IP address to the system that's connected to the Internet. Often, you have to have two separate Ethernet cards inside your PC—one that talks to the internal LAN, and one that talks to the Internet. Internal-only IP addresses, like those used for home networks, are "hidden" from the Internet.

Windows 98SE has a built-in utility called Internet Connection Sharing (ICS), which provides decent basic functionality, but has limited security features. Security matters with an "always-on" connection like DSL, because the last thing you want is your system being used as a "front" for one of those dreaded denial-of-service attacks on big sites. A significant step up from ICS is Tiny Software's GameRouter (**www.gamerouter.com**), which adds more sophisticated routing capabilities. Tiny is working with game developers to make game servers work with GameRouter. For example, they've worked with Blizzard to enable GameRouter support for STARCRAFT on BattleNet. Players sharing single-user connections can connect with all their internal systems, provided each has a legal STARCRAFT license key. But, if the server isn't GameRouter-aware, then you still have the same problem. Also, GameRouter needs the system connected to the Internet to have two network cards—a hard requirement. And finally, GameRouter seems incompatible with security apps like BlackICE.

A typical home-network connection to the Internet

No Trespassing

There are several good "firewall" tools that keep unwanted visitors out, and that are simpler to use than the more sophisticated packages used by businesses. Two I've tried are BlackICE (**www.networkice.com**) and ZoneAlarm (**www.zonealarm.com**). Both do a good job, though I find BlackICE's user interface to be a little simpler. Both set up and work automatically, but let you configure security levels, add "friendly" IP addresses that can access your system, and exclude particular systems from access.

The Promised Land

The best solution to this problem is, as is often the case, the most expensive. What you really want is a dedicated IP address per system. This may be as simple as calling up your ISP and paying a few extra dollars per month for additional IP addresses, though some ISPs refuse to issue additional addresses. Another solution is to get a small business Internet package, which provides several email accounts and a number of dedicated IP addresses. But you'd probably have to be either a hardcore gamer, or have a business reason for the account, because these typically cost in excess of $100 per month.

But if you do have the luxury of multiple IP addresses and a fast, digital connection like DSL or cable, then you're in gaming heaven. I have this type of setup, and often have people over for gaming sessions, and friends from the Net can "drop in" if they know the server's address. Having your LAN talk to Net-based game servers is doable, if you're willing to spend the money. CGW

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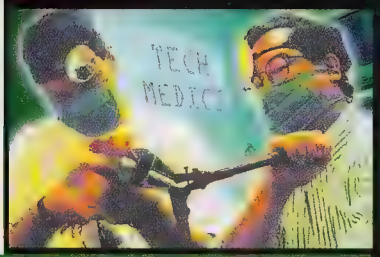
Tech Medics



You've Got Questions, We've Got Answers

by Loyd Case and Dave Salvator

Wounded on the technological front? Our medics may be able to patch you up and get you back into the action. Send your gaming-related technical questions to **cgw_hardware@zd.com**.

Shut Down Interruptus

When I shut down Win98/2nd Edition, I never receive the message: "It is now safe to turn off your computer." Instead, it continues to spin and says, "Windows shutting down." When I turn off the machine and restart it, everything seems fine and a ScanDisk is performed. I didn't have this problem until I upgraded to 2nd Edition. Any ideas?

There was a bug with Windows 98 and some ACPI (advanced configuration and power interface) enabled systems. You should disable power management, or update your BIOS.

Sound Performance

Why do some 3D sound cards perform better than others? Surely the software can't cause that much difference.

Software can make a big difference. For example, HALF-LIFE does a lot of additional geometry calculation when using Aureal Vortex2 cards, slowing down the frame rate. But the audio chips themselves differ in how much they offload the CPU. A lot also depends on how the features of the sound card are used. For example, some cards allow up to 320 MIDI voices – but only 64 may be supported in hardware.

Country-Fried RAM

I have a Micronics M55Hi-Plus board (based on your recommendation). I have been very satisfied with it; but, while struggling with a corrupt CMOS, I managed to fry it so that now one bank of the SIMM sockets kills memory. I would like to find a board that will still support my Pentium 200 MMX for another year or so until I make the move to Pentium III. What do you recommend?

You might look into one of the "Super 7" motherboards. We suggest checking out a board that uses the VIA Apollo MVP4 chipset. That way, you'll have an AGP slot, PC100 SDRAM support, and ATA/33 hard drive support. You'll still have a lowly Pentium 200MMX, so don't expect miracles. But it should ease your transition into more current generation technologies.

Get on the Bus

I'm confused. On one Web site, I read that the Athlon supports a front-side bus of 200MHz. On another, it says that Athlon systems use PC100 SDRAM. Then there are the new motherboards that use the KX133 chipset, which can use PC133 SDRAM. Is the Athlon front-side bus speed really 200MHz?

The Athlon is theoretically capable of a 200MHz front-side bus speed, but in practice it only runs at that speed to the system's north-bridge chip. Beyond that, memory is accessed at the speed supported by the core logic chipset. In the case of the AMD 751 chipset, that's PC100 SDRAM; the KX133 chipset can support PC133 (133MHz) SDRAM.

TECHTIP

You've no doubt heard us sing the praises of GeForce-based 3D cards with 32MB of DDR SDRAM memory. They're the fastest thing going, and have headroom left for future games. Cards using this configuration include Hercules' Prophet 3D DDR and Creative Labs' Annihilator Pro, with prices ranging from around $250 to $300. But maybe you've already got a pretty fast 3D card, say, something based on nVidia's still-speedy TNT2 Ultra chipset (found in Guillemot's Xentor 32 and ELSA's Erazor III). Does the move to a GeForce-based 3D card make sense yet?

To find out, we took a fairly new system – with a Pentium-III 500MHz, 96MB of system RAM, a Vortex2-based sound card, and EIDE storage components – and benchmarked both cards to see how much performance the upgrade would yield. Turns out that the GeForce card netted about a 20 percent frame rate increase in 3D GameGauge testing, which is a pretty hefty leap.

But, the leap doesn't come cheap, since GeForce-based cards with DDR memory are at least $250. So, if your current setup still feels pretty fast, then game on and enjoy. But if your rig is starting to feel a bit pokey, and you've got better than a 400MHz Pentium II, consider making the move. And even if you do a motherboard/CPU swap up the road, you can migrate this card into that new setup where it'll keep you going a while longer.

Video games may be graphic, but until you've played them with a set of Yamaha YST-MS30 speakers, you won't get the full picture. That's because Yamaha's exclusive Advanced Active Servo technology elevates thundering explosions, bone-cracking punches and screaming race cars up to catastrophic proportions. And just wait until you hear what this system can do for your favorite MP3 and CD music. This is no time to be squeamish. Get a Yamaha YST-MS30 speaker system and experience the full force of your computer's sound.

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Power Rig

Component	Manufacturer	Price	The Skinny
Motherboard	Asus P3C-E	$200	AGP 4x
NEW CPU	800MHz Intel Pentium III	$730	Faster chips are hard to find, and pricey
Memory	128MB of PC800 RDRAM	$850	RAMBUS
Disk Controller	Adaptec 29160	$260	Slightly faster, but also PCI 64 support
Primary Graphics	Hercules Prophet DDR-DVI	$300	DDR SDRAM and T&L support
3.5" Floppy Drive	Teac	$20	You still have to have one
Hard Drive	Quantum Atlas II	$850	Now at 36GB
Backup	Creative DVD-RAM drive	$599	5.2 gigs of backup
CD-ROM/DVD	Pioneer 6x SCSI DVD	$160	New Pioneer Slot-Drive DVD
NEW Monitor	Mitsubishi DiamondPro 2040u 22"	$1,250	Perfectly flat; good USB support
Primary Audio	Sound Blaster Live Platinum	$175	For four-speaker DirectSound, A3D, and EAX
Speakers	Boston Acoustics BA4800	$199	Loud, clean, uncolored, and fabulous
Modem	3Com SDSL modem	$400	DSL at last
Networking	3COM Etherlink 10/100 PCI	$60	For fragging my buddies
Networking Hub	Netgear DS108	$170	Multiplayer & DSL modem support
YY Minicube Case	Yeong Yang	$213	Lots of cooling
Power Supply	PC Power and Cooling Turbocool 300	$99	More power, Scotty!
Keyboard	Microsoft Natural Keyboard Pro	$59	In with the Natural, out with the Newtouch
Mouse/Pointing Device	Microsoft Intellimouse Explorer	$65	No balls!
		Total w/o Game Controllers	$6,659
Flight Joystick	CH F16 Combatstick USB	$65	It just feels right
Rudder Pedals	CH Pro Pedals USB	$100	Nearly perfect foot placement
Driving Controls	ECCI CDS 4000	$1,250	For the serious sim driver
Gamepad	Interact Hammerhead FX	$40	DualShock-like controller
		Total	$8,114

The Fine Print: All recommendations based on actual evaluations and testing. Prices listed are average low quotes from Web price search engines like **www.computershopper.com** or **www.pricewatch.com**. – *Lists compiled by Dave Salvator and Loyd Case.*

Lean Machine

Component	Manufacturer
NEW Motherboard	Gigabyte 71X
NEW CPU	Athlon 750 w/cooling fan
Memory	128MB PC100 SDRAM
Disk Controller	Built-in UDMA/33
NEW Primary Graphics	Creative Labs Annihilator Pro
Floppy Drive	Teac
NEW Hard Drive	Maxtor Diamondmax 6800 plus 10.2GB d
CD-ROM/DVD	Pioneer DVD-114
Monitor	Optiquest Q95
Primary Audio	Aureal SQ2500
Speakers	Boston Acoustics BA-635
Modem	Actiontec PCI Call-Waiting Modem
Case	Elan Vital T10-AB
NEW Power Supply	Antec 300W
Keyboard	Microsoft Internet Keyboard
Mouse/Pointing Device	Logitech USB Wheel Mouse
Joystick	Logitech Wingman Extreme Digital
Gamepad	Gravis Gamepad USB

KILLER RIGS IN A BOX

Want a full-bore gaming beast without having to build it? We've got you covered. These two systems tested very well, and will put you into the fray without your ever having to charge up the electric screwdriver.

Power Rig

Alienware's Athlon-based Area 51 Aurora system impressed us last month with its very solid performance, hiccup-free stability, and oh yeah – it's all-black, too. With an 850MHz Athlon CPU, 256MB of PC133 SDRAM, a 32MB DDR SDRAM GeForce-based 3D card, a 34GB hard drive, and Klipsch's mighty ProMedia V.2-400 4.1 speaker set, this system is ready to rumble.

Alienware's Area 51 ▪ $3,847 as configured ▪ (800) 494-3382 ▪ www.alienware.com

Lean Machine

Hypersonic was a first-time entrant into our Ultimate Gaming Machine roundup last December, but its Silver Bullet system came, saw, and kicked ass in our "Bang for the Buck" category. The Silver Bullet can be outfitted with an Athlon 750MHz CPU, 128MB of SDRAM, Hercules' GeForce 3D card with 32MB of DDR SDRAM, a 27GB hard drive, and a 4.1 Altec-Lansing speaker set. This system comes in at just under $2,500, and for that price, packs one helluva wallop.

Hypersonic Silver Bullet ▪ $2,495 as configured ▪ (800) 520-0498 ▪ www.hypersonic-pc.com

WHAT ABOUT 1GHZ CPUs?

No sooner did AMD announce the availability of 1GHz chips than Intel followed suit with its own. Despite all the hoopla, have you tried buying one of these processors? You can get a 1GHz Pentium III all right, so long as it comes in a box with the Dell logo on it. Similarly, you can get a 1GHz Athlon with the Compaq or Gateway logo. Curiously, the CPU speed gains matter less and less – the clock-rate difference between 900MHz and 1GHz is small in terms of real CPU gains. As we've seen in the Falcon Northwest Mach V review in this issue, a killer graphics card makes up for a slight difference in CPU speed.

Both Intel and AMD are guilty in this CPU brinkmanship race, though Intel is somewhat more disingenuous. You can at least *buy* an 800MHz Athlon with a bit of searching. 800MHz Pentium IIIs are much, much tighter, though I've stumbled across a few offered with serious markups. In fact, all Pentium III's above 700MHz are hard to find. At least RDRAM supplies are easing, though not the price.

So the Killer Rigs this month have 750 and 800MHz CPUs respectively – but are built with an eye towards faster parts later.
–Loyd Case

Price	The Skinny
$150	5 PCI slots, stable Athlon board
$400	Enter the challenger, AMD
$150	128MB, squeezed in
$0	It's in there
$280	32-bits, transform and lighting, DDR
$20	Still gotta have it
$130	Fast and cheap
$105	Slot-drive DVD
$350	Solid 19" monitor at a budget price
$49	A3D and clean audio for under a C-note
$70	You can't find better, cheaper
$70	Solid performance, good price
$75	Back to the old-familiar
$49	Drunk with power
$24	Cheap, nice add-on buttons
$30	Better than the "gaming" mouse
$39	Cheap, decent 3D stick
$30	Solid, basic gamepad
Total	**$2,021**

KILLER RIGS GO ATHLON

Many of you have asked why we haven't recommended Athlon-based systems in our Killer Rigs. Our reluctance wasn't based on Athlon's performance. Clock for clock, AMD can go 15 rounds with Intel and still stand tall. Our problem with AMD arose from stability issues with Athlon-compatible motherboards. But motherboard makers MSI and Gigabyte have finally worked the kinks out of their boards. The systems we've tested have been so stable that they finally compelled us to switch our Lean Machine over to Athlon. We opted for Gigabyte's 71X, though the MSI 6167 we saw in last month's Alienware box also ran like a champ. Both of these boards are based on AMD's 751 Irongate chipset. Motherboards using Via's new KX133 chipset were available at press time, but we didn't have time to really shake them down to see if we should recommend them. Intel's 820 chipset does have some extra "headroom" that most of us won't really need, but make no mistake: Athlon-based systems can stay the course and keep your games screaming.
–Dave Salvator

FALCON NORTHWEST MACH V

Price: $5,593 • **Manufacturer:** Falcon Northwest • **Contact:** www.falcon-nw.com

Kitchen-Sink System Packs a Serious Gaming Wallop

While the big boys (Dell, Compaq, Gateway, et al.) are getting preferential treatment from AMD and Intel, companies that sell dedicated gaming systems have to make do with slower CPUs. After putting the latest Falcon Northwest Mach V through its paces, I'm not sure I'd miss a 1GHz CPU.

Falcon Northwest outfitted the system with the biggest, baddest hardware it could find. The centerpiece is their Falcon Northwest/Hercules Prophet DDR SE card. This time, Guillemot (who supplies the card) is confident they can make enough cards to satisfy the needs of Falcon's customers, but both companies are playing it safe: You can only get the SE with a new, high-end system. The Hercules SE card ships with a core clock rate of 152MHz and a memory clock of 173MHz (346MHz effective, since it's using DDR memory). Most GeForce cards are clocked at 120MHz core clock speed, with the memory clocked at 150MHz (300MHz effectively). So what does over-clocking GeForce by 27 percent buy you?

Put simply, performance is exceptional. The GameGauge 2.5 score is a stellar 65.5. Hell, even QUAKE III posted a 66.3 fps score in 32-bit color at 1024x768. Clearly, the era of 32-bit color is upon us. More importantly, the system was very stable through testing, even with the current draw from the supercharged GeForce card and the 10,000RPM SCSI drive.

Athlon systems have achieved a level of stability equal to that of Intel-based systems.

Breaking down the scores a bit, it's not surprising that fill-rate-intensive games benefit from the faster graphics card. For example, RE*VOLT's frame rate barely shifted going from 16-bit to 32-bit color. On the other hand, games that were more CPU-intensive – like USAF and PANZER ELITE – posted scores roughly even with the Dell XPS800 we tested a couple of months ago, probably due to the much slower 300MHz L2 cache on the Athlon 900. Even so, this system is seriously fast.

More importantly, the stability of Falcon Northwest's new Athlon-based rig (and the same stability seen in Alienware's 850MHz Athlon box last month) demonstrates that Athlon systems have achieved a level of maturity equal to that of the best Intel-based systems.

While this system is designed with no compromise, Falcon will also build to order. If you really want it but the price tag puts you off, just replace SCSI with EIDE storage, drop the hardware DVD decoder, and you'll have it for less than $4,000. There won't be any perceptible game-performance difference. *–Loyd Case*

Let's Do the Numbers

	Dell XPS800	Falcon NW Athlon 900
3D GameGauge Score	62.02	65.47
RE*VOLT (1600x900x32, 24-bit textures, triple-buffered)	60.70	70.36
EXPENDABLE (16x9x32, triple-buffered)	43.00	40.74
3D WinBench 2000 (1024x768x32)	62.60	76.60
3D WinBench 2000 CPU Test	1.59	1.49
Content Creation WinStone (1280x1024x32) (tests 2D-graphics performance)	29.60	34.80

PROS

Faster than a Ferrari, and more reliable.

CONS

You could build three Lean Machines at this price.

What $5600 Gets You

- 900MHz Athlon CPU
- 256MB of SDRAM
- Viewsonic PF790 UltraFlat 19" monitor
- Quantum Atlas 10,000RPM 36GB hard drive
- Toshiba IDE DVD drive
- Hewlett-Packard SCSI CD-RW
- Klipsch Promedia speakers
- Hollywood+ DVD decoder
- Creative Labs Sound Blaster Live
- 10/100 Ethernet card
- Zip drive

Reviews

Boston Acoustics BA4800 Speakers

3Com Internet Gaming Modem

Product photos by Hayden Houser/DIGITAL CLARITY

BOSTON ACOUSTICS BA4800 SPEAKERS

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD EDITORS' CHOICE

Requirements: Dual-output jacks from a sound card • **Price:** $200
Manufacturer: Boston Acoustics
Contact: www.bostonacoustics.com

There's a "listening fatigue" that occurs when audio isn't clean – such as when listening to music through PC speakers – and your ears don't want to take it anymore. But I could listen to the BA4800s all day long.

The BA4800's are a four-speaker rig designed for 3D-positional audio. There are four compact satellites and a powered bass unit. All the connections are conveniently color-coded. The rear speakers mount on short tripods, and are a little capsize-prone. Controls consist of volume, subwoofer level, and surround level. There's no headphone jack.

Music sounded clean, and I got volume levels in excess of 103db, at which point the speakers strained but didn't break up. Compared with Klipsch's ProMedia V.400s, the BA4800s don't develop as much volume but sound better on music; for games it's a coin-toss, and there is the $50 price difference. Game audio and DVD-movie playback were stunning. If you have $200 to spend on speakers, get the BA4800s. You won't regret it. *–Loyd Case*

SAITEK GM2

Requirements: USB port, Windows 98, DirectX 7.0a • **Price:** $50 (street)
Manufacturer: Saitek Industries
Contact: www.saitekusa.com

If I had heard about this without seeing it first, I probably would have groaned, "Oh great, *another* first-person-shooter controller the world doesn't need." But when I saw this device at last year's E3, it looked encouraging. Rather than some convoluted "six-degrees-of-freedom" controller you want to hurl through the window, Saitek basically built an improved "keyboard" and attached a decent mouse to it.

The GM2 gives your left hand a convex controller with six buttons and a programmable view-hat, and a sprung thumb dial for strafing. The unit's wheel-mouse is good but not great, though its programmable thumb-driven view-hat can come in handy. But if you don't like Saitek's attached mouse, you can use the GM-2's left-hand control with your own mouse.

I found that the GM2's thumb dial wasn't really responsive enough for fast-paced shooters. But the GM2 really stands out in tactical sims like ROGUE SPEAR. Here – using the downloaded config – the thumb dial let me peek around corners, and quickly jump back if there was trouble. Having easy-to-reach keys to direct team members was also a big plus. *–Dave Salvator*

3COM INTERNET GAMING MODEM

Requirements: Free PCI slot
Price: $100 (street)
Manufacturer: 3Com Corporation
Contact: www.3com.com

Lag is a drag. Knowing that much of the latency in online games is due to modems, 3Com set out to build a better gaming modem. A noble endeavor, a needed endeavor, but unfortunately, a failed endeavor. In fact, in our tests, the Internet Gaming Modem (IGM) actually produced higher latency when trying to reach game servers.

The IGM installs painlessly enough, and has a little system tray utility where you can enable or disable "Gaming Mode." Gaming Mode disabled makes for better Web surfing, whereas enabled supposedly makes for better online game performance.

We compared the IGM with 3Com's Sportster 56K fax/modem using Windows' PING utility, which measures the time for data to get from one machine to another and back again. We looked at ping times to three UNREAL TOURNAMENT servers, and here, the IGM was 10 percent slower with Gaming Mode enabled and 24 percent slower with it disabled. Save your pennies and get DSL or a cable modem instead. *–Dave Salvator*

Nox

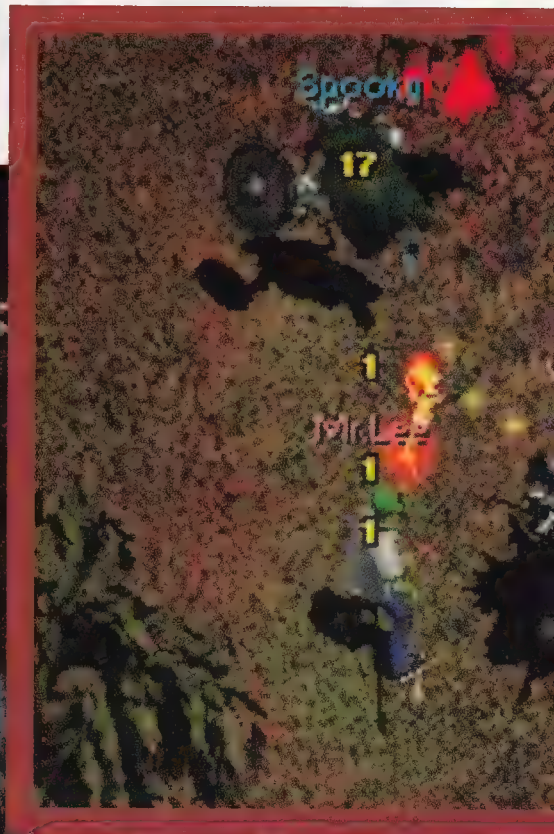
WILEY WIZARDRY WACKINESS BY TOM CHICK

When Thomas Hobbes coined the phrase "nasty, brutish, and short," he was talking about the life of a Warrior in multiplayer Nox. Everyone else is slinging colorful magic with real-time lighting effects, while the Warrior scrounges in the shadows for arms, bangs on the "war cry" button, and tries to remember where he saw that healing potion. More deadly to the Warrior than any Mechanical Golem is lag, which will have him swinging a sword in mid-air where his target was standing several milliseconds ago, or charging at full speed into the nearest wall. I believe it was Sun Tzu who said, "The way of the Warrior is back to the character selection screen, where he can choose a Conjurer or Wizard instead." Once you've heeded this bit of ancient wisdom, you too can perform these Stupid Spellcaster Tricks.

- **If you get used to the "R" key, you won't have to worry about scrolling through sets. For instance, "RRA" always fires off the first position on the second spell set; "RWA" is always the first position on the last spell set; and so on. Think of each spell as a word.**

- **Always have Blink accessible as a panic button. I have it in the first position on all my spell sets so that whenever I hit "A," I'm whisked away to safety. Well, whisked away, at any rate.**

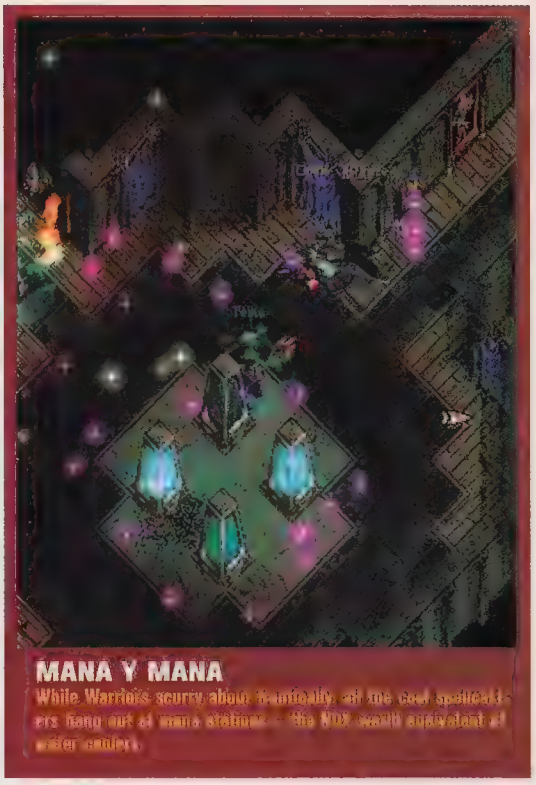
- **There's nothing quite so satisfying as playing a Wizard on the Inferno map: cast Run or Confuse on your enemies and watch them immolate themselves. Bring marshmallows.**



- One of the first things a Wizard should do on any level is set his teleport markers near mana stations and a choice staff. The markers stick around even after a Wizard respawns, so he can use cheap Teleportation spells to run a pattern through the level.

- If you're a Conjurer, choose your friends wisely. On open maps, hang out with multiple small, fast units that use ranged attacks: Urchins, Mechanical Flyers, and Imps. On corridor maps, call up the traditional slow bruisers, and sling inexpensive Slow and Stun spells to help them catch their prey.

- A Vampirism spell on a summoned creature goes a long way towards giving it extra longevity. It also lets you save healing spells for more important creatures, like yourself.



MANA Y MANA

While Warriors scurry about frantically on the cool spellcasters hang out at mana stations. The NOX wealth equivalent of water coolers.

- Conjurers shouldn't forget to use their Charm spell in multiplayer games. Not only is this is the easiest counter to big expensive golems, but it's a gratifying way to hoist another Conjurer on his own petard.

RUN SPOOKY, RUN

Right about now, Spooky is wishing he had chosen a spellcaster.

- There's no EPA in NOX. Cast Protection from Poison on yourself and spit out Toxic Clouds with impunity. Wizards can do this with Protection from Fire and Burn.

- As a Wizard, carry one of your traps around with you. When someone kills you and loots your possessions, you'll have the last laugh.

- Play at 1024x768 resolution. This lets you see farther than players running at lower resolutions, so you'll often be able to attack someone who doesn't even know you're there. This is great for sniping with precision spells, like Death Ray and Fist of Vengeance. It's also a great way to get 640x480 weenies to accuse you of cheating.

CGW TIPS

Cheats, Hacks, & Hints

ULTIMA IX: ASCENSION

Since reagents don't stack in UA as they did in previous ULTIMAS, here is how to get through the game with only one set of reagents (one of each kind): When binding a spell, you'll be prompted for a spell name while lighting the candles. While this prompt is active, you can still grab items with the cursor. Grab the reagents from the binding circle, stash them back into your belt, *then* enter the name of the spell. Voila, a spell is bound without consuming reagents.

Some other Easter Eggs:

- **At the end of the islands over the far northwest corner of the map (past Yew), there is a pool with a smiley face in it.**
- **Just south of the moongate in Yew is a rabbit-shaped rock with a circle of carrots in it.**
- **Starting in Earth, open and close the freezer eight or nine times for a surprise.**
- **Rumor has it that players can assassinate Lord British himself. At the start of the game, use the rat poison in the bread machine to create a poisonous loaf of bread. You can take this loaf from Earth to Britannia. When you get to Lord British's castle, go to the kitchen and replace the normal loaf of bread with the poisonous loaf. Eventually, Lord British will come in and eat the poisonous bread and die. *Warning: This will make the game unwinnable.***

–Shawn Overcash

Congratulations to our winner, who used virtual assassination as a hook. Shawn's zany BozoBin prizes include copies of BEATDOWN and MORTYR, and a nifty 1602 A.D. mouse-pad with built-in compass! Enjoy!

ACES HIGH

Shoot To Kill With the Deathdot

Want to score more hits in ACES HIGH? Get rid of that huge, target-hiding gunsight!

Using the Windows Start menu, open Paint, utilizing Programs/Accessories/Paint. With File/Open command, look in the Aces High/Sights directory and then open "default.bmp", the standard AH gunsight.

Then, hit the View button and Zoom to an 800% Custom size. The sight will have a purple background with a green "plus sign." The purple is clear in the game. Now, just erase the long green bars, leaving only the square dot in the middle. Save this in the Sights folder as "Deathdot.bmp" so that you still have the original. To try your new sight, rename the original sight (default.bmp) something else, and rename "Deathdot.bmp" to "default.bmp".

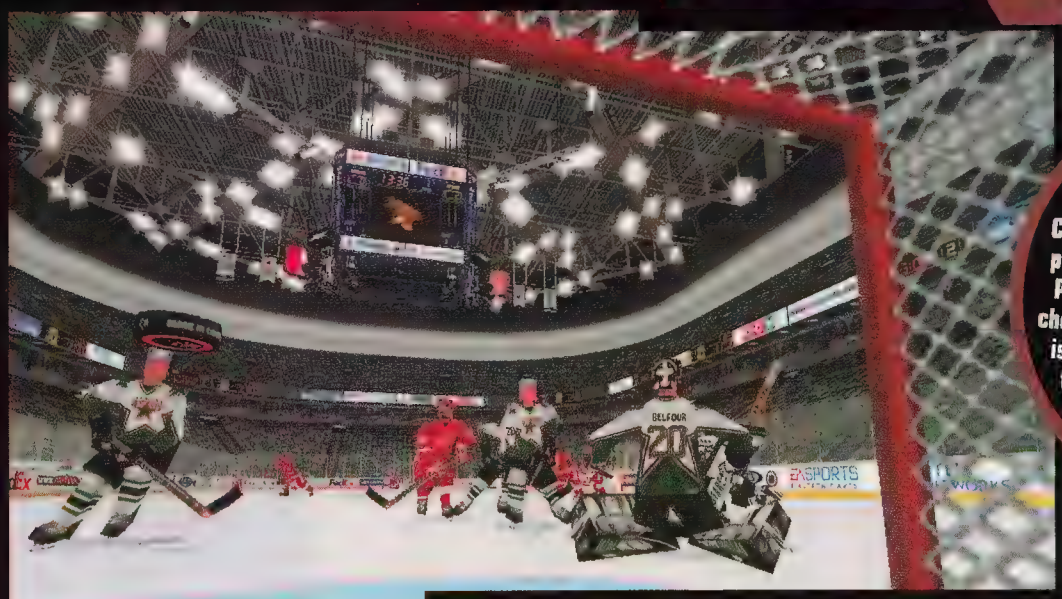
While there are other custom gunsights at www.hitechcreations.com, none are quite as effective as the Deathdot. *-Ryan Nolan*

UNREAL TOURNAMENT

The Weapons You're Not Using

Any fool can deathmatch with a just a Rocket Launcher. Most fools do. So allow me, ladies and gentlemen, to introduce you to the Weapons You're Not Using. The *Shock Rifle combo* (shoot the secondary-fire plasma ball with the primary-fire beam) requires too much precision in the heat of combat, but that big purple explosion is perfect for flushing campers and snipers out of their hiding spots without having to expose yourself. Don't forget that the *Ripper's secondary fire* is like a junior rocket launcher – and you won't slice your own head off with it. The *Snot Gun* (referred to as the GES BioRifle in polite company) is probably the least-appreciated weapon. In close quarters, run around with the plunger pulled all the way back (i.e., the right mouse button held down) poised to make a one-glop kill. And in open areas, you'll find that most players don't have enough sense to avoid sludge. "Oh, gosh," they think, charging blindly through the showers of snot, "boogers...I'm so scared..." After a few mucus frags, they'll learn to Respect The Snot. *–Tom Chick*

Send your tips, tricks, and strategies to cgw_letters@zd.com (please put CGTIPS in the subject line) and we'll publish one submission each month. Please do not simply cut and paste cheat codes from the Web. If your tip is published, we'll send you something pulled at random from the Computer Gaming World BozoBin!



NHL 2000

Looking for a high-percentage shot? Try this: If your forward is right-handed, have him bring the puck down the left side (right side for southpaws) until he's even with the goal, then skate hard towards the edge of the goal. Once he's close, skate on a sharp angle away from the goal and then shoot while still skating away. You are, in effect, screening the goalie with the shooter's own body. It's not a sure thing, but you'll score on at least half the attempts if you can pull it off! *–Jeff Lackey*

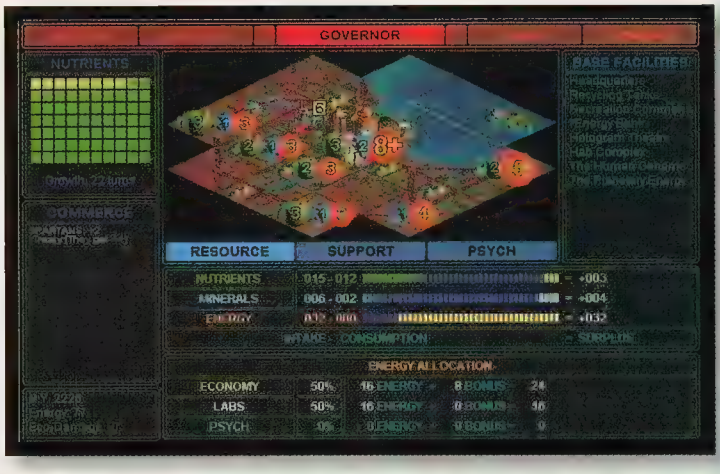
MiG ALLEY

In the Spring Offensive campaign (the only dynamic campaign in the game), you'll find that the AAA and MiG opposition becomes very heavy, very quickly, in the areas in which you are concentrating your attacks. That's due to the excellent enemy AI: It shifts its forces to counter your air strikes. Therefore, you should vary your target areas, hitting inland-central targets one session, key coastal-area targets the next. This will ensure that a much higher percentage of your squadrons return home to fight another day! *–Jeff Lackey*

SID MEIER'S ALPHA CENTAURI

The Morganites are a challenging faction in SID MEIER'S ALPHA CENTAURI. Use the bonus energy to quickly buy units or improvements, and then continue to "push" development by hurrying production with extra credits. Don't allow a large fund to accumulate unless you're expecting attack. If attacked, the Morganites' best defense is to bribe enemy units, as the inherent support penalty – plus the additional constraints of likely social choices (Democracy) – preclude a large military. SID MEIER'S ALIEN CROSSFIRE adds a Secret Project that gives the Morganites some extra help in this regard: The Planetary Energy Grid. Build this as soon as possible.

Looking for a free, comprehensive guide to learning SID MEIER'S ALPHA CENTAURI? Try apolyton.net/forums/Forum31/HTML/000049.html. *–Bruce Geryk*



Inside HOMEBREW GAMING

BY T. BYRL BAKER

tbbaker@email.com

Tweaking the Sounds of Violence

Those of you keeping track of my self-admitted faults can add Impatience to the list. When I get a new game, the first thing I do—before even installing it—is look for updates on the Web. I want add-ons and patches before I even begin playing the original game, and it gets even worse once I really begin to dig in and start finding flaws.

Inevitably, nothing is posted online yet because the game is so new, and I begin poking around in the files that make up the game to see what I can modify. You'd think an utter lack of programming skills would hinder my progress; in fact, I don't even use hex editors because I end up hosing things so badly—but usually these sorts of hacks aren't required. More programs than ever are shipping with .bmp and .pcx graphics files, and .wav sound files, all of which are easily editable.

How You Can Change the Sound of Your Favorite Games

Rowan's MIG ALLEY is an excellent case in point. I launched myself into the wild blue yonder more times than I'd care to discuss the first three weeks I had the game, and in the process I became very attached to my nimble F-86. It wasn't long before I was using the included nose art editor to customize my mount, but a greater concern than personalization loomed on the horizon. Although I've learned the fundamentals of energy management in a dogfight, I still can't discipline myself enough to use any sort of fuel management. This leads to a lot of extended gliding and deadstick landings, which aren't too terrible, except that the engine-out wind noise in MIG ALLEY has all the charm of a dentist's drill.

I finally found the offensive .wav file and loaded it into Windows' chintzy Sound Editor. There I reduced the volume by half, then repeated the process before saving the file. The difference is amazing—deadstick landings now sound more like I'm in a plane of 1950's vintage and less like what one would expect to hear while straddling an inbound meteorite. That aggravation over, I immediately touched up the gunfire and bomb sounds to add more punch.

Most of the games you have sitting around can be modified in some way using just Paint and the other crappy tools that come with Windows, and loading the files into a program like Photoshop or Soundforge can yield professional results with very little effort. There's nothing as eerily cool as hearing your own voice responding to game events or barking out orders, even if said voice, like mine, has been likened by many to that of a prepubescent teen gargling gravel.

If you don't want to go through the hassle yourself, at least consider downloading enhanced sound files from the fan community. I'll never forget how much EUROPEAN AIR WAR was transformed by MeatWater's EAW SoundPack. Gun noises are loud enough to shake your shingles (but still extremely realistic), and the engine noise is truly deafening.

With the proper subwoofer, those bass rumblings emanating from the P-47's big radial engine will do much to eliminate the pucker factor, if you catch my drift. I ended up disabling the new engine noises out of sheer concern for my neighbors, although they still must suffer every time my .50 caliber machine guns chew up a target (individual sounds can easily be toggled on or off to tailor the SoundPack to your needs). Visit **www.meatwater.de** to see what else this ultra-talented sound designer has cooked up.

Don't overlook text files or .ini files either. For the longest time, the only way to make trees appear in JANE'S WW2 FIGHTERS was to bump up the CulturalDetail number in the .ini settings. As far as I know, a similar tweak still is the only way to turn on the "naughty language" mode in that game (set the MildLanguage switch to No). Most titles these days can be profoundly changed with a little creative adjustment of their .ini settings, and text files are another gold mine for easy editing.

I took my first stab at modifying text files during a mild addiction to Microprose's MAGIC: THE GATHERING games, when I became sick of the lame taunts the computer opponent dished out. The game turned much more, ahem ... colorful, after I gained control of the AI's tongue. Call me pathetic, but at least I keep myself occupied while waiting for the real fanatics to release the good add-ons. CGW

Inside SIMULATIONS & SPACE

BY GORDON BERG

Letters, We Get Letters...

Last month I somehow managed to get mentioned in *CGW*'s letters section, so I thought a column based on some of the sample emails I receive on a daily basis would be a good idea. After all, it would be a real shame to deny you, the loyal reader, the experience of personal joy I feel each and every day reading and responding to thousands of electronic correspondence. Ever since I took this job as the sim columnist, my email volume has skyrocketed! For example, here's a typical email I often receive from you, the simulation and space enthusiast:

A Peek Into the Sim Guy's Mailbag

"Greetings. Like most people, you are probably interested in taking advantage of the wealth of opportunities available on the Internet. Would you like to hear more about a way to create a stream of income from your home, using your computer and leveraging the explosive growth of the Internet?"—sender994

I truly appreciate the genuine interest in my financial well being, as expressed by the concern of *sender994* here. It's really touching, and brings a tear to my eye every time I receive similar sentiments in a constant and steady manner from many of my readers. But believe me when I tell you I am fiscally sound. Remember, I *do* write for *CGW*. In the future, don't be too shy to ask me about flight sims, okay?

"Hello, my name is Holly. Come see me and my friends at our Adult Playground for some wild and crazy adult fun. You must be of legal age to view this site as it is very sexually explicit." —hollypop

Yes indeed – flight sims are not for children! Actually, there was no need for *Holly* to state the obvious: It is true that pilots – virtual or otherwise – drive the women crazy! I've tried to email *Holly* several times, but the email keeps bouncing back. *Holly*, if you're reading this, can you check and see if something's wrong on your end?

"Hey Gordon, love your column. I keep my *CGW* subscription alive all because of you! What can I do to become a successful flight-sim magazine personality such as yourself?"—*Eager in Edmonton*

Thanks for writing in, *Eager*! I completely understand your desire to be more like me. First off, any true path towards an attainment of power similar to what I now wield as the single greatest force in the simulation industry usually requires blackmail, and lots of it. I can't tell you how many doors opened for me once I showed *CGW*'s Editor-In-Chief George Jones pictures of himself naked while "reading" Martha Stewart's *Living*.

"Hi Gordon, love your column. I read your review this issue on FIGHTER ACE 2 (I edited it, remember?). You couldn't even shoot down a plane in the Arcade Arena?? What a loser. Now, why did I marry you?" —Your Wife

Look, sweetie, you're still overreacting about *Holly*. She probably needed help with a force-feedback joystick or something! You can't expect me to abandon my readers, can you?

"Gordon, love the column, etc. Can you help me out with Jane's F/A-18? I was hoping you could explain what it means on page 5-104 of the manual when it says 'If there is no L&S target when TWS sub-mode is entered, the highest ranked MSI trackfile is designated the L&S target.'"
—*Technical in Tuscaloosa*

Uh...

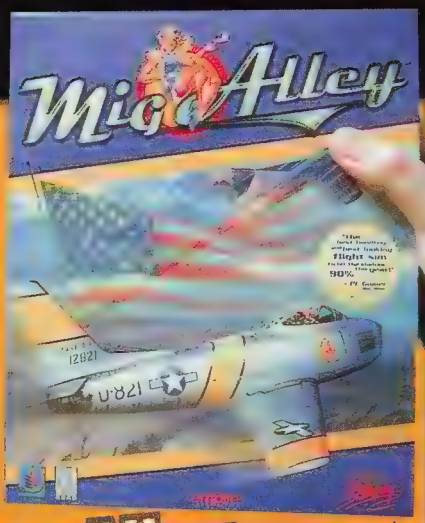
"Yo Gordon—if you're such a 'sim' guy, why don't you ever write about driving sims?" —Everyone over at rec.autos.simulators

Oh look, I've reached the end of my word-count limit. See you next month!

CGW

Gordon's Mix

1. *The Abyss DVD*
2. *My NCAA brackets, which once again were a total bust.*
3. *Haven't had time for a single game this past month, courtesy of the day job.*



Mig Alley, Where For Art Thou?

I keep reading in the flight sim newsgroup about how nobody can find a copy of MIG ALLEY on store shelves. Flight Sim Of The Year by every single major gaming publication and Web site, and it's nowhere to be found? Chad's experience summed it up best in the following Usenet post: *"EB was temporarily out of stock. Best Buy didn't have it. And Software Etc. had never heard of it, nor did they have it in their computer system. MIG ALLEY's problem isn't the fans or the market. It's the distribution. I went home that day with the forty bucks still in my pocket."*

Sure, it can be bought online, but that won't address the kind of impulse purchases that can occur at a major retail outlet. Hey Interplay, find a way to get this sim *out there*.

When not engaged in aerial maneuvers, Gordon Berg works as a network administrator for a non-profit social services organization.

Inside STRATEGY

BY ROBERT COFFEY

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Putting Minds Into Mindless Entertainment

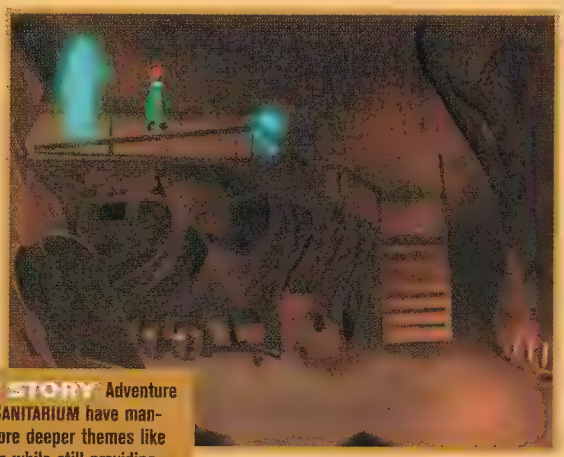
Character... Narrative... Investment... Choice... Emotion.

These are the five fundamentals of game design as voiced by Ed Fries, General Manager of Microsoft's Game Group, at this year's Gamestock. It's a great list, a list that encompasses all the things that other entertainment media have employed to enjoy success: The best films, music, and books inherently embrace these concepts to reach and affect their audiences. It's only logical that the best games would incorporate these elements as well. But I think Fries is just a little off-target regarding emotion. The best films, the classic books, and the songs that endure transcend raw emotion and live in the realm of expression—and *this* is what games should be striving for if they're looking to truly grab hold of the mainstream.

Our Strategy Editor Wants More Than Cheap Thrills

Expression is a difficult concept to pin down, but let's look at it this way: Expression adds ideas to emotion to create something greater and more lasting than simple feeling. It's the difference between a standard gangster movie and *The Godfather*, between *Archie Comics* and *The Watchmen*. By reaching beyond mere entertainment, art forms find an enduring place in the public psyche.

Game designers—with music, art, and narrative at their disposal, plus the added bonus of an involved, interactive human participant—should be able to achieve the same thing. And while it's not too difficult to find examples of expression in some RPGs and adventure games (such as SANITARIUM, with its disorienting, emotionally-raw gameworld, and the original SYSTEM SHOCK, with its meditation on humankind's complicated relationship with technology), it's a rarer trait in strategy titles. But that may be changing.



GHOST STORY Adventure games like SANITARIUM have managed to explore deeper themes like grief and loss while still providing great entertainment. Games this intense stay with you long after they end; strategy games need to do the same thing.

As impressive as the 3D environments are in HOMEWORLD, it's the cold immensity of deep space and our insignificance in the presence of it that is that game's most lasting impression. Hopefully, future strategy games will follow this lead, giving us experiences where we feel the terror of war even as we command our forces, or where our resource management has consequences beyond what units we can build. Where are the WORLD IN THE BALANCE-caliber games of 2000?

Well, good news—we may already have the first great example of deeper issues in strategy gaming, and judging from early sales figures, it looks like it's reaching more people—more non-gamers—than other titles. It's THE SIMS, and it could be heralding the future.

Look beyond the elaborate Rorschach test that is THE SIMS, and you'll see that it's virtually impossible to play it without comparing the virtual lives of your gibberish-talking digital avatars to your own day-to-day existence. It can be enlightening, dispiriting, or wryly ironic, but inevitably—whether by choice or happenstance, somewhere between the brutal brinksmanship of bladder management and the rocky uncertainty of developing intimate relationships—there is something being said to the gamer. And it's up to you to listen.

Think of gaming as another showcase, a digital vaudeville for this new breed of entertainers. As the arena evolves, it will be the artists of substance who will continue to thrive, entertain, and reach us long after the plate-spinners and dog acts of game design have passed from our memory. CGW

Revisionist History

After spending more than a recent few nights pitting Champions against Magogs in HEROES OF MIGHT & MAGIC III: ARMAGEDDON'S BLADE, I'm haunted by the desire to go back and shave about half a star off our original rating. Why? For starters, the more time I spend with the new Elemental units, the more I hate them. This aversion has undoubtedly impeded my progress through the campaign, since I totally eschew available Elemental towns in favor of developing my forces at any other town. But I'm more troubled by a gameplay dynamic that, while not outright killing my enjoyment of the game, has diminished it significantly, and that's an almost formulaic victory path. It seems as if every scenario hinges on just one strategy: Load up one hero with all your forces and take out the strongest enemy hero early in the mission. Fail to do that, and defeat and frustration are certain to follow. ARMAGEDDON'S BLADE is still largely fun, but I miss the more balanced and, in the end, more challenging play options of the original.

Rob's Mix

1. SAMMY SOSA HIGH HEAT BASEBALL 2001
2. [illegible] with real balls, and everything!
3. [illegible] beta
4. [illegible] FANTASIC WORLD
5. HEROES IV MIGHT & MAGIC III: ARMAGEDDON'S BLADE

Inside SPORTS

BY GEORGE JONES

Will the X-Box Kill PC Sports?

PC Sports Games = Men's Diving

Inside Games is more than a little concerned about the potentially devastating effect Microsoft's newly announced X-Box might have on PC sports gaming. Sports game fans are typically less hardcore about PC games than your average PC gamer, so they might flock to a $350 Windows box with quality graphics, fewer crashes, and no start-up or installation time. Which would mean that millions of dollars would flow from PC sports games to X-Box sports games. And if we don't see boxing or college sports because there aren't any dollars in them on the PC platform, it's not hard to imagine the same thing happening to baseball or even basketball.

Maybe. For now, let's drown our worries in baseball fever

"Most PC games won't be threatened by X-Box," one member of Microsoft's game group responded when asked whether the X-Box could threaten PC gaming, "But sports games [on the PC] could have problems surviving."

Here's hoping that the ease of portability from Windows to X-Box will mean that PC sports games will be spared the fate of no-profit collegiate sports around the country.

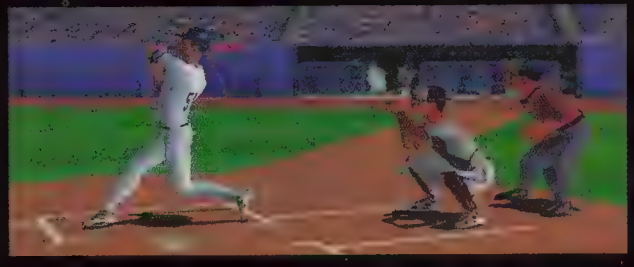
Top of the First

With final versions of HIGH HEAT, MICROSOFT BASEBALL, and TRIPLE PLAY 2001 on hand, baseball is on the collective mind of *CGW* this month. And while 3DO's 1999 Sports Game Of The Year follow-up is the consensus winner (see this month's review), it's interesting to break down the three titles' drastically different approaches to the game.

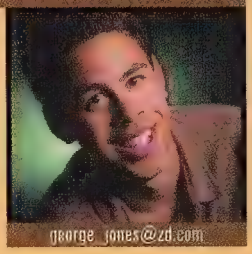
Electronic Arts, to their credit, knows exactly who they're aiming for—gamers who want the *SportsCenter* highlight reel aspects of the game, meaning "extreme baseball." Microsoft's approach lies at the opposite end of the spectrum, with a slower-moving style of play that takes a magnifying glass to specific details of the game. Its pitcher/batter interface—in which you place pitches (or swings of the bat) in specific zones—is illustrative of this, but clashes conspicuously with the game's lack of features such as a player draft.

The HIGH HEAT approach can best be summed up by Mark Dickenson, 3DO Executive Director and baseball champion. "We really think baseball games are not as much about 'features' as capturing the essence of the sport in a way that people can understand it. Everyone has a slightly different view of the game, and we need to create something that allows each player to get what it is they are looking for out of the experience."

The real test, of course, is which game sells more copies. Unfortunately for 3DO and Microsoft, EA Sports is a ferocious opponent in this category. But with their marketing strength, Microsoft can beat you, even if you have the better game.



Mario Golf and Microsoft



george_jones@zd.com

ITSA ME, TIGER WOODS! MARIO GOLF's remarkable gameplay is influencing PC sports developers.

Rumor has it that Ed Fries, General Manager of Microsoft's Game Group, strongly encouraged all the members of Microsoft's sports game division to play MARIO GOLF for the Game Boy Color. At Gamestock, Microsoft's annual gaming show-and-tell, Fries even cited the pint-sized golf game as a prime example of the kind of sports games Microsoft should be making.

Hold your chuckles, *por favor*. MARIO GOLF manages to put together what very few sports games have even tried to achieve: a fairly deep strategic sports game that incorporates story elements, increasing skills and experience points, and a certain magic something that keeps you wrapped up in the game.

Baseball Nostradamus

In the Gaming Imitates Life department, we ran both MS BASEBALL and HIGH HEAT 2001 through our rigorously scientific, season predicting simulations. The HIGH HEAT engine advanced Atlanta, Pittsburgh, San Francisco, the NY Mets, Boston, the NY Yankees, Cleveland, and Seattle to the playoffs, with the San Francisco Giants seizing the momentum of the newly constructed Pac Bell Park to beat the Yankees in the World Series.

Microsoft's stat engine picked Seattle, Baltimore, Boston, and the Yankees in the AL; while Atlanta, the Mets, St. Louis, and San Francisco made it in the NL. The World Series was the shocker, with the Mariners beating St. Louis to win it all. Make you wonder if Seattle might enjoy a special kind of home team advantage.

George's Mix

1. The Best American Sports Writing of the Century
2. [illegible]
3. [illegible] MADNESS 3 beta
4. Los Angeles Lakers (playoff edition)
5. Direct TV

Inside ACTION

BY THIERRY "SCOOTER" NGUYEN

The Sound of the Fury

I usually write my columns drunk on a (not so delicate) mix of *Red Bull* and vodka. My excuse is Mark Twain, who said, "Write drunk, edit sober." About a day after Jeff Green (*uber* columns master and *Greenspeak* guru) tells me that he'll be needing my column soon, I hit the bottle and hammer away (both at my brain and at the keyboard).

One night, after a few Flaming Dr. Peppers, I was typing away as usual when I heard one of my Ramen packets drop onto the floor from the shelf. In my drunken stupor, I mistook it for some sort of hooligan in my room, and ended up whirling around in a dazed furor of fright.

That is, it took a single sound in a room of silence to frighten me greatly. The number of games that even come close to giving me that same experience all fit on one hand.

Most of the time, the sound is, well, passable. My retinas are constantly jammed with curvy surfaces, vertex lighting, blah blah and blah, but my ears are relaxed and listening to standard, over-the-top gunplay. Sound design is so recycled and clichéd, I swear, the sound of the Imp growling in DOOM has been used in everything from QUAKE FORTY-TWO to VW commercials. Even our Game Of The Year, UNREAL TOURNAMENT, had merely above-average sounds. Sure, they were an improvement over the original UNREAL, but that's because they were loud and bass-heavy. It's still just the same, Michael Bay-style rock'n'roll rocketry when it comes to sound design.

Looking Glass (and their alumni, Irrational Games) seems to be some of the only people who realize the intense power of sound design. Dead silence coupled with lingering, semi-identifiable sounds is their forte. Only they could make a pack of monkeys, or the mere sound of footsteps clanging against metal, oh-so-damn-frightening. Maybe it's time to clone them.

Sound design doesn't have to just extend to liberal use of silence for a sense of dread and suspense. It includes everything from HALF-LIFE's satisfying crossbow "thunk!" (I've yet to find another sniper weapon with as satisfying a sound) to OUTLAWS' amazing Western soundtrack. Instead, we usually get "we'll add a coupla hundred decibels to this cookie-cutter sound other games have been using since DOOM" as the motif for sound design.

Remember, our father of geekdom (George Lucas) found out that when comparing THX-enhanced versions of *Star Wars* alongside non-THXed versions, people said the THXed one *looked* better, despite sound quality being the only difference. If our brains are wired goofily for such a thing to happen, then someone needs to take advantage of that. Maybe there needs to be both a visual engine guy *and* a sound engine guy. The hardware is there; we just need the people to actually use it. Someone needs to find a genius way to use one of those 3D APIs—either with something subtle, like how snow muffles everything from speech to firearms, or more outrageous, like a pitch-black level where sound is your only guide. Hopefully, we can have something more akin to *Saving Private Ryan* than to *Armageddon*.

As of now, it's pretty sad that a ten-cent packet of Ramen is, aurally, more immersive than a forty-dollar game with graphics that make my eyes bleed but sounds like just another action flick.

From the "Thank God We Don't Have to Review N64 Games" Department

DAIKATANA is out...for the N64. I had completely forgotten that there were going to be a few ports of this game (Game Boy Color? Excuse me?) until I saw the new EGM (May, with the Tony Hawk cover). It ain't pretty; the first line of the lead review is "The phrase 'don't believe the hype' has never applied more to a video game." Other choice phrases include "No options and no variety mean no good score for this poop," "A lot of the story seems thrown together," and "A terrible disappointment." Bad puzzles, horrid AI, and underwhelming graphics (even with the RAM Pak, they're way too choppy) were recurring themes in the reviews. Most notably, the N64 version lacked the AI buddies that were hyped up for the original release. Overall, the average score is 3.8 out of 10. Ouch. Could this be an omen? You'll find out, whenever the PC version gets reviewed (could be next month, could be next year...).

Let Slip the Cows of War

Speaking of UT, I can finally talk about the Bonus. The level design is rock-solid, focusing more on gameplay-heavy levels, although there are still some cool gimmicks like those in DM-Healpod][.

The Relics add a lot to the game as well. I particularly like both Vengeance and Redemption. Alas for two things: You have to use the console to bind a key to discard Relics (I only note this because UT usually doesn't require archaic console use), and the new models aren't guaranteed to work. I had to manually edit my User.ini file and patch some office machines to be able to use the new models in multiplayer matches. Other than those two annoyances, and the lack of Assault maps, the UT BONUS PACK is worth the download.

Scooter's Mix

1. *100 Bullets #10 (writer Brian Azzarello and artist Eduardo Risso)*
2. *Warren Ellis and Chris Claremont revamping the X-books*
3. *THE SIMS*
4. *UNREAL TOURNAMENT*
5. *POKEMON BLUE*

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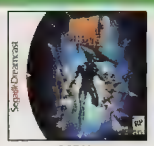

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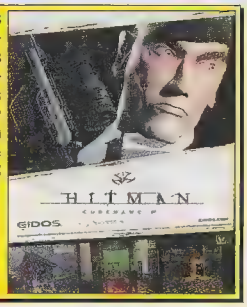
'HALF LIFE: TEAM FORTRESS 2: BROTHERHOOD OF ARMS' Battle as part of a cohesive squad of fellow warriors all bent on the same goal, whether it's storming a beach, demolishing a bridge or escorting a VIP to safety. Assume one of 12 roles, each with unique strengths and weaknesses. If you're looking for a straight-up fight, you'll choose Marine or Commando. Prefer the shadows? You'll make a cunning Spy or Sniper. Focus the raw force of your team's talents through communication and strategizing.

$42.95 — Sierra (Action) Release: 10/00 PC CD

'HITMAN: CODENAME 47' casts you as a hired assassin and chronicles your progress through a series of contracts. Includes some 27 levels that cover five actual hits, as well as the preparations necessary to make those hits - accumulating equipment, information, and the like. Most missions are comprised of about 80% planning and 20% action.



Eidos (Action) Release: 5/00 PC CD — $32.95

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'HALO' is a 3rd person action/shooter from the creators of Myth. You are one fighter of an army in a battle between humans & aliens, each with their own weapon types. Vehicles include jeeps, tanks, hovercraft, aircraft, & more.

Bungie (Action) Release: 5/00 PC CD — $42.95

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Mindscape (Simulation) Release: 9/00 PC CD — $44.95

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Nintendo (Adventure) Release: 6/00 N64 — $59.99

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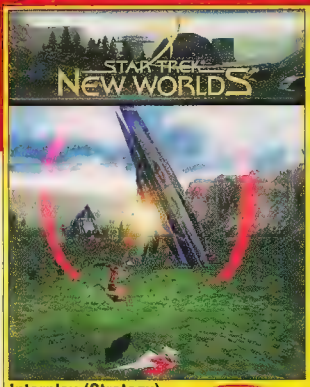

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Interplay (Strategy)
Release: 9/00
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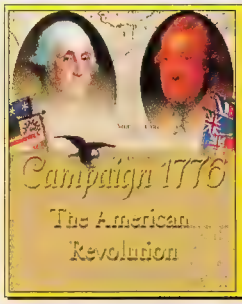

'CAMPAIGN 1776: THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION' is a tactical/operational level game covering the major battles of the American Revolution from the first clashes at Concord & Lexington to the Siege of Yorktown. The game combines a detailed tactical game engine with a higher level campaign game so the player can fight individual battles, a campaign covering several battles, or the entire Revolutionary War.

Interplay (War)
Release: 3/00
PC CD
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'ICEWIND DALE' A single, or multi-player, RPG set in the Forgotten Realms. The game focuses more on classic dungeon adventuring than on an overland quest. Features AD&D second edition rules, more than ten new, major, areas as well as several smaller locations to explore, and over 50 dungeon levels. Explore ice-filled mountain passes, geothermal cave systems, haunted Elven ruins, & more.

Interplay (Roleplaying)
Release: 6/00
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by Jeff Green

What Would Blizzard Do?

Want to Make a Great Game? Follow the Lessons of the Masters

Why do companies make bad games? This is a question that constantly perplexes me and keeps me up late at night, like a bad case of gas. I spend half my time at this job looking at games that I can't believe ever made it out the door. Call me naïve, but I just don't get how it happens. I don't get why, somewhere along the line, there isn't a conversation like this one:

Game Exec #1: I don't know what the hell we were thinking here. I'd rather eat my own vomit than play our game.

Game Exec #2: No kidding. I'd rather eat your vomit than play our game too. We suck.

Game Exec #1: Let's cancel this piece of junk and apologize in public for even trying to make this game.

Game Exec #2: Yeah, then let's fold the company. It's wrong to take people's money for crap like ours.

I know there are lots of factors involved. I know that making games is hard work. But some companies manage to do it very well, over and over again—so it can't be impossible. Look at Bungie, or Bioware, or Bullfrog. Or, for the best example by far, look at Blizzard Entertainment.

Now, I don't mean to deify Blizzard here, because that wouldn't be professional, and I'm still waiting for their last bribe check to clear anyway. But when your last three games are WARCRAFT II, DIABLO, and STARCRAFT—three undisputed classics—you are clearly doing something right. And based on what I saw of DIABLO II for this month's cover story, it looks like they're going to do it again.

It got me thinking, as I drove home from Blizzard late that night, that if I were to start a game company, the first thing I would do is make up bracelets for every employee, engraved with the letters "WWBD?" What Would Blizzard Do? And this would be just part of my answer:

Hire Gamers: You need talented people to make games. You also need people who understand that what they're making *is* a game. The best people for this are gamers themselves. Everyone on the team should have a clear idea of what they're trying to make, and why. If there's one person who doesn't get it, or doesn't believe in it, or thinks the game is lame, then you have a problem. Everyone on the team needs to be the game's biggest fans, and harshest critics.

Avoid Big Egos: After 11 hours at Blizzard North, I still had no idea who did what on DIABLO II. That's because everyone was talking about every aspect of the game, and no one took any credit for anything. Art guys were talking code. Programmers were talking art. No one individual tried to hog the credit. With all due respect to Sid Meier, I don't think a game should ever have anyone's name preceding the title unless that person wrote all the code, designed all the levels, rendered all the animations, and wrote the story and dialogue. Games, like movies, are group efforts. Give everybody a voice, and you can't help but have a better game. Give one guy too much power, and you end up with DOMINION.

Do Not Make Technology the Focus of Your Game: Every time I hear a programmer or designer drone on about how cool their game is because of the way they made raindrops fall, or the way shadows are rendered, I want to stick their head in a vise, twist it a couple notches, and then shout into their ear the following: *No one cares.* DIABLO II is a 2D game in 640x480 resolution—and if it isn't at least nominated for Game Of The Year by every major publication and Web site, I'll do Scooter's laundry for a month. In the end, it's all about gameplay. Period. The only people who care about your raindrops are other programmers, and your mom. The rest of us just want a good game.

Play Other Companies' Games: No matter how cool you think your game is, someone else is now cooking up a game, or has shipped one already, that's cooler than yours. You need to see everything, play everything, and keep an open mind. Remember TIBERIAN SUN? It seemed like Westwood had not played one RTS the whole time they worked on it. DIABLO II'S delays are not being caused by laziness, or incompetence. It's the exact opposite. Blizzard North has been obsessively tweaking the gameplay. Why? Because they play games. Because they see what's good, and they want their game to be even better. Competition: It's a good thing.

Every time I hear a designer drone on about how cool their game is because of the way they made raindrops fall...I want to stick their head in a vise and then shout in their ear: *No one cares.*

Forget About Christmas: If you ship a game early, sacrificing quality, just to make Christmas, then you are, well, how can I put this delicately? You are a moron. Yes, I know, lots of people buy games in December. But lots of people buy games all year, too. The original DIABLO didn't make Christmas back in 1996. And guess what? It's *still* on the bestseller list, three years later. People are *always* in the market for a great game. You want to indulge in short-term greed over long-term quality and reputation? See you in the bargain bin.

Jeff wants every DIABLO 2 beta tester to send their best bone armor to jeff_green@zd.com.

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